

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ² “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the LORD heard this.

³ *(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)*

⁴ *At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you.” So the three of them came out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, ⁶ he said, “Listen to my words:*

*“When a prophet of the LORD is among you,
I reveal myself to him in visions,
I speak to him in dreams.*

⁷ *But this is not true of my servant Moses;
he is faithful in all my house.*

⁸ *With him I speak face to face,
clearly and not in riddles;
he sees the form of the LORD.*

*Why then were you not afraid
to speak against my servant Moses?”*

⁹ *The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.*

¹⁰ *When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; ¹¹ and he said to Moses, “Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. ¹² Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother’s womb with its flesh half eaten away.”*

¹³ *So Moses cried out to the LORD, “O God, please heal her!”*

¹⁴ *The LORD replied to Moses, “If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back.” ¹⁵ So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back. (Numbers 12:1-15)*

Are You Humble?

“I’m a very humble person – just ask me.” Bragging about being humble seems a bit contradictory, doesn’t it? A truly humble person would probably never call attention to how humble they really are. That observation has caused some people to question the Word of God that we have before us this morning from the book of Numbers. Moses wrote this book. And he wrote: **“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.”** Does claiming to be the most humble person on earth seem very humble to you? Probably not. But Moses wrote what God told him to write. And there was a reason for saying this. God was drawing a contrast between Moses and his own brother and sister, Miriam and Aaron. As we study this incident, we need to ask a very important question: **are you humble?**

I.

Humility is an attitude. When it comes to our relationship with God, it’s joyfully accepting what God sends us. My friends, **are you humble? Do you accept your place in God’s plan?** Even famous Christians struggle with that sometimes, as Aaron and Miriam show us. The people of Israel were on their way to the Promised Land. They had marched up out of Egypt. They had spent a year camped in front of Mt. Sinai where God spelled out for them the covenant that they were to live by until Jesus came. But the people were already getting tired of Moses’ leadership. And Miriam and Aaron complained about their brother. **“Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?”**

Moses’ authority rested on his position as God’s messenger. Miriam and Aaron felt like they were getting the short end of the stick because God had given messages through them, too. Miriam is called a prophetess. Aaron was the one that Moses used to give God’s messages to the people. They felt like they had an equal share in the ministry. So they grumbled and complained against Moses. And God heard them. He came down in a pillar of cloud and he confronted them. God pointed out that Moses was unique among all

people. God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friends. No other prophet ever claimed that honor. So God asked Aaron and Miriam, **“Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”** When they spoke against Moses, they were speaking against God himself.

They really had nothing to complain about. God had given Aaron the second highest office in Israel – he was the high priest. Miriam was one of only a handful of female prophets mentioned in the whole Bible. That wasn’t good enough for them. Part of the problem may have been that Moses was the youngest of the three. Miriam could remember the day their mother had cast him adrift in a basket and the daughter of Pharaoh had found him and then Miriam herself had brought their mother to nurse him for the princess. Aaron remembered when Moses was living as a shepherd in the desert and didn’t want to come back to be the prophet, so God had appointed Aaron to speak for him. Whatever the reason, they were jealous and they sinned.

That, my friends, is the application for us. You see, each of us has a place in God’s world. In every station of our lives, every one of us has someone in authority over us. Wherever you work, almost always someone else gets to make decisions that you have to live with. You may talk until you’re blue in the face trying to convince them to do something that you know would make sense. But they get to make the decision. Every teenager has to deal with those parents that just don’t get it. But they get to decide if you can use the car. They make all the rules and you have to live with it. Here in the church, those pastors, those councilmen, those men make all the decisions and the rest of us have no say. Sometimes, they’re just being stupid.

Does any of that sound familiar? You know what? You might be right. Your parents might not get it. Your boss might be totally wrong. Your pastor’s leadership of the church might be totally brain dead. But God appoints the people over us. He expects us to treat those people with respect. We can only do that if we have the humility to accept that maybe God knows what he’s doing. Don’t you think God understands our lives a little better than we do? Of course he does! He’s God. And he doesn’t feel any need to share his thinking with us. So when he puts someone over us that we feel is a total moron, he calls us to be humble enough to accept the role he asks to play. He calls us to respect that person. To honor them and obey their authority, in love as true children of God. Now, that doesn’t mean we can’t aim to move up at work, or to change our station in life, as long as we do it in a humble and God pleasing way. But God calls us to trust that for today, this is the best situation for us. If it weren’t, he would’ve put us somewhere else.

Sinful pride makes that very difficult because it always puts me first. When we resent the way that God has arranged our lives, we sin and we deserve God’s punishment in hell forever. God knows how easy it is for us to slip into sinful pride. He knows the resentments that fester in our hearts and the poison that spews from our mouths when other people get to tell us what to do. He knows how hard it is for us to humbly and joyfully live in the station he has given us.

But God reacted differently to that knowledge than we would. If you had someone working for you and you knew they resented every decision you made, wouldn’t you make a point of showing them who’s boss? Wouldn’t you look for a way to convince them to seek other employment? Wouldn’t you wait for them to mess up and then pounce? God didn’t do any of those things. Instead, God sent Jesus to be humble in our place.

Jesus never said, “This is what I want. This is what I deserve.” Instead, his whole life said, “God, your will be done.” Jesus was the Son of God long before he became man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. His Father said to him, “Go down there and live like a peasant. Be born in a stable and struggle your whole life just to get by. Go down there and be slandered and attacked by everybody who seems important. Go down there and let them nail you to a cross and then let me pour hell itself out on your head. Do all that because that’s what I want. Do it because that’s what those stupid, pride-filled sinners need. Do it for me and for them.”

And Jesus did. He took that horrible assignment. He had every reason to complain about how lousy the working conditions were and how unfair the job was, but he never did. Jesus was even more humble than Moses. And he laid down his life to pay for all that we are guilty of. He was the one person who ever lived who did not deserve to die for his sins. Yet he did die. He died for you and for me. Then he rose and God has wiped away all our sinful pride. It’s gone from his records. Every moment of bellyaching. Every time we resented the parents he gave us or the boss he set over us or the pastor he called for us. God has forgiven all that we are guilty of. In his eyes, we have been just as humble as Jesus was.

II.

When God takes our sin away, he frees us from all punishment. But that is not always the end of the matter. God knows how much life we have left in this world. He forgives us and then he works to keep our sin

from killing our faith because we still have to live here. Sometimes, the way God deals with us is painful. But he sends that pain because he loves us. How do we react when God does hard things to teach us to avoid sin? My friends, **are you humble? Do you recognize God's love in your life?**

It may seem like there's a certain unfairness in the way God deals with Moses' siblings. Both of them challenged his authority. But only Miriam suffered leprosy. That was a very serious matter. Under the covenant that God had just given them, she was unclean. No one could touch her. One of the most basic human needs is physical touch. How often don't we parents drape an arm over our children's shoulders? How often don't you spouses lay a hand on your husband or wife's hand while you're watching TV? Miriam was cut off from all that human contact.

Why wasn't Aaron? In the Hebrew there are hints that Miriam was the driving force behind this whole affair. Aaron was the high priest. If he would've contracted leprosy, he couldn't continue in that office. God wanted him to continue. So Miriam suffered the brunt of God's anger. And Aaron was left pleading with Moses to help her. And Moses did. He asked God to forgive Miriam and Miriam was healed.

But God didn't drop the matter. For one week, Miriam was confined outside the camp as someone who was unclean. The text doesn't say if she remained a leper for that time or not, but it seems likely, since lepers could not associate with the people. Why did Miriam have to go through this public punishment? Because her sin was public. God wanted his people to understand the importance of honoring his representatives. For forty years, Moses was going to deal with a people that constantly rebelled against him and against the Lord. God was trying to show them that this was a real sin that they needed to avoid and repent of. Miriam needed to learn that too. She needed help in breaking down the pride that demanded better treatment from God, so he humbled her in front of the entire people.

God was looking beyond this one day to eternity. He wanted all of them to reach eternal life and he knew that sinful pride is the greatest enemy we have to our faith. That's still true today. God continues to send the cross into our lives to teach us to let go of sin and pride and to cling to him. Sometimes, it works very much the way that it worked here. But God knows when to discipline us. Sometimes, when we sin we suffer the consequences. Now, God still loves us and he still forgives us, even if he makes us suffer those consequences. We'll still live with him in heaven. But he wants to teach us for our lives here. He knows that if he lets pride and sin fester in our lives like an infected wound, the poison will kill us. So he treats the wound – often by sending very painful consequences here.

If you get drunk and you're late for work, you might get fired. That's a consequence of your sin. God forgives you and even takes care of you, but you might have a rough time paying your bills while you look for a new job. That's not punishment, as long as you repent. It's God working to curb the power of sin in your heart while his gospel works to strengthen our faith. Your faith is like gold in a mine. When it's dug up, it's full of impurities that smelters burn out. The sin in our hearts are those impurities. God turns up the heat to burn them out because faith is the most important gift you have here. Faith in Christ will bring you to heaven. Faith in Christ will give you the strength you need to face the realities of life in this world. So God works to strengthen and purify that faith.

That's not always easy for us to accept. It's our nature to whine and complain about the consequences of our sin, even when we caused those consequences. But that's why God never stops. He loves you. So he will always do what's best for you. He sends consequences to beat down our sinful flesh. But you need more than just pain. When the consequences come, turn to his word and his love. When you're guilty and you've made a mess of our life, go to the cross and see Jesus there, dying for you and then go out to the empty tomb, and see that he has taken your sin away. Then remember that in all the consequences of your sin, God is working for you. Through that gospel, God will build you up.

God loves us enough even to send consequences when we sin. They don't always come. When they don't, that's God's mercy. But he decides. He's the only one who can. Faith is a humble trust in God's love in Christ. Accept that God knows what is best in your life and be content in the station he gives you. Trust in Jesus and know that even when you suffer, even when it's your own fault, God does everything to keep your faith alive until you live with him. Amen.