**The Frailty of Godly People**

**Numbers 20:1-13**

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***1*** *And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and was buried there.*

***2*** *Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.* ***3*** *And the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD!* ***4*** *Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle?* ***5*** *And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.”* ***6*** *Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them,* ***7*** *and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* ***8*** *“Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.”* ***9*** *And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him.*

***10*** *Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?”* ***11*** *And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.* ***12*** *And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”* ***13*** *These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy.*

Have you ever spoken or acted in frustration and afterwards regretted it? Has that ever happened to anyone here, where you’ve spoken or acted out of frustration? Frustration is the impulse we feel when our own expectations are not met; when we are faced with a problem that we believe we shouldn’t even have. We are tempted into frustration when a reckless driver swerves in front of us. We are tempted into frustration when a referee makes a bad call that costs our team the game. Can I hear an ‘Amen?’ (Laughter!) We’re tempted into frustration when we discover that our son or daughter, instead of studying, has been playing video games the entire night.

Frustration is deceiving. It’s deceiving because it makes us feel so righteous when we vent it. We act upon this impulse and we feel as though our harsh words, our harsh actions are completely justified. We look at our response to frustration and we think, “Well, *someone* had to straighten them out. It just had to be me this time.” Friends, frustration is always of the flesh. It is always an impulse of our sinful nature. In Galatians chapter 5, Paul teaches us how we can rise above our natural fleshly impulses by keeping in step with the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;

I call to your attention this morning that in the nine qualities listed as characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit, a life that is walking in the Spirit, frustration is not listed among them. (Laughter!) The Spirit never produces frustration. Frustration is from another source. When we feel frustrated over anything, we should hear warning bells ring through our souls. You see, frustration acts as a bridge between our flesh and a thousand different sins.

I remember when one of my boys was in the ninth grade. He and I were playing tennis and I was attempting to coach him in order to improve his game. I saw that he a lot of natural talent and that through a little bit of hard work, he would become really refined at the game. And so that morning as we went out, I had this attitude that I really want to build into his life. I really want to connect with him and I really want to help him in this game of tennis. But it was an off morning for him. He was resistant to my instruction from the beginning. He wasn’t fully present. He really didn’t want to be there. He began to express his displeasure in passive ways. And I believed at the moment that this was a problem that I should not be having. I was giving my morning to invest in my son, to care for him and love him. He should be sitting at my feet just soaking in every word, loving that his dad is loving him in this moment. It should be one of those wonderful times between a father and son, and it was anything but that.

And as I responded in frustration, his rebellion increased. Finally, he said something to me that was very disrespectful. It was something that he had never said in all of his life. He just blurted out something very disrespectful. And I was through with it! I was just done! I was at the baseline on my side of the court; he was on the other side of the court. I bounced the ball once, and as hard as I could, I just fired a ball at him. Now, I was expecting that he would be looking at me, but he wasn’t. He had even turned away in his disgust against me. And so he turned just at the last second as the ball whipped right by his head. I didn’t intend for the ball to get that close to him. I intended for him to see it coming from a long distance, but he didn’t. He was shocked by it, and he looked at me in bewilderment. And I looked at him bewildered for a moment. And then I thought, “I’m not going to show that I’m bewildered. I’ve got his attention!” (Laughter!) So I looked at him and I said, “We’re through! Pack up the bags.” So we packed up the bags and I was silent and throwing things in the bags for emphasis. We packed up and we got in the car. I wasn’t speaking a word to him; he wasn’t speaking a word to me.

On the drive home though, the Spirit of God began to speak to my hard flesh and the Spirit of God began to soften me. He began to convict me that my frustration was not of Him, that it was unrighteous, that it was sinful, and that I had sinned against my son. I turned to my son and said, “Son, I was wrong when I struck that ball at you. Will you please forgive me?” He looked at me and he said, “Yup, dad! I’ll forgive you.” Then it was quiet for a moment. It was sweet to have this softening spirit, but then that frustration began to build a little bit again inside of me. I began to think, “Well, I said I was wrong…” (Laughter!) “I asked you to forgive me. He still doesn’t get it. He started this whole thing.” I was tempted to say something, but then the Holy Spirit said, “Ritch, now is not the time to say anything about that. Now is the time to communicate to your son that you sinned, and that’s the end of the story.” Now later, of course, our relationship was repaired.

Frustration places us in great spiritual danger. It’s not a small thing! It’s a huge danger because frustration will destroy our faith. That’s what frustration does when we turn it loose in our soul. Faith understands that God orders all events for the good of those who love Him. Faith considers it all joy when we encounter trials of various kinds because we know God wants to work through that very trial to first, work in our own heart to conform us into the image of Jesus, but also then to use us as a minister in that difficult situation to throw grace and the gospel upon others around us. Frustration destroys such faith.

We must not feel that our frustration is less dangerous to our soul simply because our expectations are driven by righteousness. The devil loves to use our righteous frustrations to drive faith from our soul and replace faith with unbelief. This is what happened to Moses. His expectations upon the people were righteous. He wasn’t wrong to expect that they would be a people who worshiped the Lord, who gave praise and thanks to Him. But it was this righteous expectation that drove him to this sinful response of frustration. Moses was wrong to speak and act in frustration toward this people. He acted in his flesh and it cost him more than he could ever have imagined. Frustration tempts us into unbelief. Unbelief dishonors God and disconnects us from His divine blessing.

Numbers 20 opens with the people of Israel, some 2,000,000 or so in number, camping in Kadesh. Kadesh is on the southern edge of the Promised Land. They’ve been wandering in the wilderness for forty years, now. They’re about to enter this land that God promised them. They’ve been wandering because, back in Numbers 14, we hear the story of 38 years earlier. They send in twelve spies into the land. Ten come back with a bad report. The people believe this bad report. They disbelieve God. They reject God’s call for them to inherit the land. And God speaks with punishment upon His own people. In Numbers 14, let me read this to you. God says to them as a result of their refusal to believe God, their refusal to trust Him and enter the land, He says

**Numbers 14:28-31** As I live, declares the LORD,…your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb…and Joshua…But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected.

Not one of the people 20 and above who left Egypt, who were present in this rebellion in Numbers 14, not one of them would dwell in the land except Joshua and Caleb. They are the only two out of the whole multitude, who believe. Part of their complaint was, “If we follow you, our little ones are going to be destroyed.” They didn’t trust God to care for their little ones. Now these little ones, in 38 years, have grown up to be the big ones. That’s who is a part of this congregation in Numbers 20. Those who rejected God’s call back in Numbers 14, 38 years earlier, they have all died in the wilderness, all but a few. And we see that Miriam and Aaron die in this chapter. So these are the children of those who initially rejected the call of God to enter into the land.

Now verse 1 tells us in Numbers 20 that Miriam dies while they’re camping here at Kadesh. It’s the second time they’re at Kadesh. Again, 38 years earlier, they had been here when they rejected God’s call to enter and believed the bad report of the ten spies. And the loss of Miriam must have been unbelievably sorrowful for Moses. Remember, Miriam is the sister who watched over Moses as a baby in the basket when his mom placed him in the river. Miriam was the sister who arranged with Pharaoh’s daughter to ask Moses’ mom to care for him as he was an infant and grew, so that he didn’t need nursing care. Miriam was the one who, when the Red Sea parted and Moses led the men in this great praise time of singing, Miriam was the one who stood and encouraged the women to join in, and led a praise service with the women at the parting of the Red Sea.

Yes, Miriam failed Moses in speaking against him because he married a Cushite, but do you remember when God punished her with leprosy, what Moses’ response was? He was heartbroken over it. And he didn’t just ask for God to heal Miriam out of reluctance, but he said, “O God, please heal her—please.” (Numbers 12:13) It was with his whole heart and soul. He cared for his sister, even as his sister had failed him in that moment in Numbers 12. For the past 40 years, Miriam had not left Moses’ side. And now she is gone. This is sorrow upon sorrow.

God now leads His people back to Kadesh. And this is a place where there is no water. For 2,000,000 people and livestock, there is no water! The first time God led this people to this place, Kadesh, their parents believed the ten spies and disobeyed God. Now 38 years or so later, the children of those first grumblers repeat this very sin. They repeat the sin of grumbling against God.

***2*** *Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.* ***3*** *And the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD!* ***4*** *Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle?* ***5*** *And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.”*

Moses and Aaron have been placed in this assembly by God to be mediators, to be spiritual shepherds. So what is a spiritual shepherd to do in the face of such opposition? Well, they prayed. They fell on their faces in complete dependence before the LORD and they asked Him to provide water for the people. And God miraculously answered! God appeared to them in glory. What an amazing experience with God Moses and his brother, Aaron had! God then said,

***8*** *“Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.”*

The first time God brought out water from the rock, was at a place called Rephidim. Again, it was at the very beginning of their wilderness journeys in Exodus 17. At Rephidim, God told Moses not to speak to the rock, but to strike the rock. This time however, He says “Speak to the rock.” So Moses obeys the LORD. He does what God commands. He and Aaron gather the people around the rock. And remember, there are some 2,000,000 in number. How long does it take to gather 2,000,000 people to assemble around a place where they could all stand and see and look at this rock? Well likely, it takes quite a while. And what were the people doing as they were assembling? Well they were grumbling. They’re still complaining. They’re still quarreling. And Moses is taking all this in. As he listens to the people, he’s getting more and more and more frustrated. He’s thinking, “My sister has just died. No one has any compassion. No one has any sympathy for my grief.” He remembers the event 38 years earlier when this people’s parents grumbled against the LORD for a lack of water at Rephidim. He thinks, “I’ve been leading this rebellious people for forty years and all they do is quarrel against me. They have no appreciation whatsoever. I am sick of this!” So Moses is having a no good, terrible, very bad day. (Laughter!) Even though he does see the glory of the LORD, it’s still a bad day for him.

Moses decides not to speak to the rock as God said. He departs from God’s plan. He says, “Do you know what I’m going to do? I am going to give this people a good talking to. I am upset. I am frustrated. They need to be put in their place. And so he begins this way.

***10****…and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels:*

He thinks of the worst thing he can call these people. “You rebels! That’s what I think of you. You’re just a bunch of complainers, grumblers, near-do-wells, rebels.”

*shall we bring water for you out of this rock?”*

And then he raises his staff and BAM!! BAM!! You can hear the echo off the rock as his staff strikes hard, furiously; not once, but twice. And when he strikes the rock the second time, a miracle happens. Water doesn’t just trickle; it gushes from the rock. And everybody looks up. They see, “He was mad at us, but look, water!” And now everybody is happy. The people are happy. “Here’s water. This is what we needed.” They’re drinking, drinking, drinking. They’re watering their livestock. Moses, he probably also at this point was like, “Well, hey! Everybody is happy now. I’ve proved myself to them. I was used to bring water from this rock. Everything is fine.” What is God doing at Kadesh? If you’re taking notes, you might consider

**The Design of God in our Trials**

In our story, there are two groups of people who are very frustrated. One group has unrighteous frustration driven by their selfish expectations. The other group has an unrighteous frustration, but their unrighteous frustration is driven by godly expectations. The first group is the Israelites. They are spiritually immature people. They expect to have all the comforts of the Promised Land while they’re still in the wilderness. And this frustration is rising up in them to grumble and then quarrel and confront Moses. The second group is Moses and Aaron. They’re spiritually mature people. And they are frustrated because they have righteous expectations for the people simply to give praise to God, to give thanks to Him, to recognize that God has provided for them. It’s a righteous expectation. But they respond to this unmet righteous expectation with sinful anger. Both groups are sinning in their frustration.

Now remember who led them to this waterless place called Kadesh. That very morning, the cloud and pillar would have led them. The pillar of fire by night would have led them. God is leading them to Kadesh. He has a loving purpose for the distress. Moses didn’t take a wrong turn and happen upon this waterless place. God leads them to Kadesh where God knows there is no water and this people need water. And He brings them into this hardship, into this trial, with a very specific purpose. What is God’s design for the frustrations of the Israelites? God’s design is to teach this whole group of people to wait on Him for their needs. He is the Savior. He is the Supplier. He is Jehovah-jireh. He uses our crises to demonstrate His love, His provision, His power in supplying everything we need. And we learn to love God our Shepherd more when we see Him rescue us out of crisis, when we see Him provide for us in the very midst of our need. For 40 years in the desert, all that these folks needed, God had provided. God is not going to let them down now. God so often designs hardships for us to prove Himself faithful, to prove Himself sufficient so that our joy in worship would grow, would flourish.

The people are not wrong for wanting water. God made them with bodies that had a physical need for water. But the people, in their longing for water, sinned by grumbling instead of praying. They could have gone to the LORD and requested Him to provide for their needs. But instead, they complained against the LORD and they quarreled with God’s mediator. God is teaching them to trust Him with their impossible needs. And He is bending their hearts away from self-sufficiency, into dependence upon Him. By way of their example, God designs their frustrations not only for their sake, but for us as well. He designs for their trials to teach us not to grumble when we face mounting needs, when we face frustrations, when we face difficulties. Paul draws this very application in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. He says

**1 Corinthians 10:9-11** We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

These things that were hard in the wilderness, they happened to this people as an example. God inspired this very writing of this book so that we would read what happened to them and read who He is in the pages of this story, and then that we would find our life in Christ, find our life in God.

What is God’s design behind the frustrations for Moses and for Aaron? Well, God designs trials not just for immature people, but for mature, spiritual people as well because every one of us need to grow in faith. None of us ever get to a point in our life where we can say, “I’ve kind of topped out in regard to faith.” No, we all have much, much room to grow in trusting God for every part of our lives. And so God intends for these spiritual shepherds to learn how to lead by faith, to never lead by their frustration. He intends for His leaders to teach by way of example through their trust, through their peace; to respond to these frustrations in a way that leads people into worship and praise of God. This is what 1 Peter 1 says:

**1 Peter 1:6** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,

Why would God’s people rejoice when they’ve been grieved by various trials?

**1 Peter 1:7** so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ

He says the most precious possession that we have in all of life is our faith. And we can rejoice when we encounter these trials because God is shaping that faith. He’s strengthening that faith. He’s purifying that faith so that that faith which is precious because it connects us to the living God, becomes even more valuable, more treasured because it ties us even more uniquely, more intimately, more securely to our great God. And that faith results in something in the future which is beyond measure. It results in praise and honor and glory when Jesus reveals Himself at His coming.

**1 Peter 1:8** …Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

This is how people of faith respond to hardships.

Well, both of these groups here in Numbers 20 fail miserably to benefit from this trial. Neither the people nor Moses draw near to God in their frustrations. Trials themselves don’t build us up and strengthen us. It’s faith in trials that build us up and strengthen us. The same hardship that God designs to grow our faith can also destroy our faith. The same sun that melts the snow also hardens the clay. So the application is to count it joy when you encounter trials of various kinds. Whatever might frustrate you, count it joy knowing that God is at work in you to grow you into Christlikeness; to grant you something more precious that’s eternally valuable, that’s an eternal treasure. God is working through our frustrations to transform us into the very image of Jesus.

**The Dangers we encounter in our Trials**

**--The people fall again into unbelief.**

***3*** *And the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD!* ***4*** *Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle?*

“Why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us into this miserable, evil, terrible place?” Our grumbling says much about what we believe of God. What we say when we grumble reveals so much more what we believe about God than any doctrinal statement we could ever sign. Can I say that again? What we say when we grumble in hardships reveals what we believe about God far more than any doctrinal statement that we could possibly sign. The people want the LORD to know that they are not pleased with His provision, that the LORD did not fulfill His end of the bargain. They felt more cared for by the gods of Egypt than they now do with the LORD, the covenant-keeping God. The message that they’re sending not just to Moses but to the LORD Himself is, “God, you are failing us!”

Have you ever thought that God is failing you? For 40 yearsGod has shown Himself faithful over and over. He feeds them every day. Every morning, they eat manna. He leads them to water so that they wouldn’t thirst for those 38 years in the desert. He shows His presence through a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. And yet on this day, when they meet a new crisis, a crisis of going to a place where there is no water, they rise up and accuse Him of injustice. Now, before we feel too superior to the Israelites, we need to ask: Am I really any different? Do I accuse God of failing me when hardships and needs enter my life? Do I not complain instead of pray when my expectations are not met?Notice that their sin is fueled by an unbiblical expectation.

***5****… It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates,*

Well, Duh! You’re not in the Promised Land yet. God didn’t promise you, while you’re still in the wilderness, that you were going to have pomegranates and grapes and figs. And yet, they expected it. Why weren’t they in the Promised Land? Because of their unbelief. And yet, they’re blaming God that they’re not eating figs and grapes and pomegranates right now, while they’re in Kadesh, still in the wilderness. God told them that this part of the journey in the wilderness would be difficult and hard. He didn’t hide that fact. But the people had an unbiblical expectation that Kadesh would be like the Promised Land.

Here’s the principle: We will grumble against God if we expect this world to be like heaven. Sometimes we think like a people and we talk like a people and we sound like a people who expect heaven now. We think, “Things ought to be much better than they are. Life shouldn't be this hard.” Friends, this world is cursed by sin. It is broken by our rebellion. Yes, thank God, in His goodness we often experience little glimpses of heaven because God sends rain upon the just and the unjust. He shows us some of His beauty, some of His abundance now. But we’re not in heaven yet. We should not expect that as we walk through this life, everybody around us will love us and treat us with respect and esteem. We shouldn’t expect that. We shouldn’t expect that the garden which we tend at work won’t have thorns; that all of our work will be fruitful and happy and productive. We shouldn’t expect that. We shouldn’t expect that things like sickness and disease and hardship and tears won’t be part of our experience. We shouldn’t expect that. God doesn’t tell us that that’s what our life will be like as we walk through this present world. God promises us heaven as our eternal inheritance, but heaven is not now. The people fall into unbelief because they let their unbiblical expectations fill their heart with frustration. They didn’t fill their hearts with the revelation of God’s provision, of God’s greatness, of God’s grace, of God’s goodness in the midst of a world that is broken. And as a result, they missed out on worship. It’s not just the people, however, who fell into unbelief.

**--Moses and Aaron fall into unbelief.**

Moses and Aaron initially respond in faith. They do what good shepherds are supposed to do. They fall on their faces before the Lord in humble dependence upon Him. “LORD, your people need water.” And God hears them. The application we draw from their initial response is that when we’re in need, let’s not grumble, but let’s pray!God hears them and He shows them His glory. The greatest gift that God could ever give us is to see who He is, to see His beauty, to see His splendor. And then, God blesses them by giving some specific instructions along with a promise. He says, “Take them all to the rock, speak to the rock, and water will gush forth.” What a great gift God gives them as they call out to Him, as they pray to Him! Now again, notice that this instruction was different than the instruction God gave to Moses when they were in Rephidim with the same kind of problem. In Exodus 17, again, flash backward 38 years. Their parents are at Rephidim. This is also a place with no water.

**Exodus 17:5-6** And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people,…and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.”

God’s plan is to show this unbelieving people His kindness, power, and faithfulness in delivering them from this threat, with a view that He will deliver them from every threat. His method of bringing water from the rock in the first place was for Moses to strike the rock. But now 38 years later, His method has changed. It’s still the same God making the provision, but His method is not to strike the rock. It’s to speak to the rock. And as Moses speaks to the rock, the rock will gush forth with water enough to quench the thirst of the people and the livestock. And up to this point, everything is great. Moses is obeying God. God is speaking to Moses and giving him instructions, giving him promises. The path is made smooth for God’s glory. But then Moses gets frustrated.

Moses does not do as the Lord commands from this point forward. First, instead of speaking to the rock, he speaks to the people. He decides to give the people a harsh lecture. “Hear now, you rebels.” God didn’t tell him to lecture the people. He did that of his own free will. He decided, “They need a good tongue-lashing. They need to be put in their place.” God never communicates to us out of frustration. He is not a frustrated God. Yes, He speaks sternly. Yes, He speaks with justice and righteousness, but never out of frustration. Moses, as God’s representative, spoke with frustration. And as a result, he didn’t speak with grace and truth. Actually, Moses becomes the very thing he condemned them for. He becomes a rebel.

Then, Moses places himself too centrally to the provision. He says “Shall *we* bring water for you out of this rock?” Moses was making this whole story now about him. He felt condemned. He felt downtrodden. He thought of this as his ministry. “This is my ministry! Shall we, me and Aaron, bring water out of this rock?” You see, servants of the LORD are to make much of God and very little of themselves, and Moses forgot that.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Moses disobeys God’s direct command by striking the rock, not just once, but twice. Now, water flows from the rock when Moses strikes it. The people are ecstatic. Moses is likely very gratified that he is part of another miracle. Everyone is happy, right? Wrong! The people are happy. Moses and Aaron are happy.But God is not happy. God is not pleased. The people were glad, but God is grieved.God disciplines Moses with a severity that is difficult for us to understand. God is going to bar Moses from entering the land of promise.

Now consider this. From the day that God spoke to Moses about this Promised Land, that is all Moses has ever dreamed of. Every morning, he gets up and he thinks about this land. Every night, he goes to bed dreaming of this land. For forty years, he is faithful as a servant to the LORD, standing courageously, standing bravely, standing obediently, standing with thankfulness and praise to God. Every morning, every night, all through the day, he thinks of this land. He strikes a rock instead of speaking to it, and God says, “No. The land you’ve been dreaming of, you will never enter; not in this life.”

But wait, God made water flow from the rock even though Moses struck it.Doesn’t that mean that God was in some way pleased with Moses? No. This is called grace. It’s called unmerited favor. God provides for His people not because the people have done right or because Moses does right. God provides for His people because He loves them. He’s free to love them and free to bless them. God’s blessing upon us does not always mean that God is pleased with us. God’s blessing simply indicates that He is an infinitely generous God. Success in ministry does not mean that the Lord is pleased with the minister. Let’s not ever make that mistake; not for ourselves when we are ministering to others, and not in our evaluation of other ministries. God often produces fruit from the work of servants who are disobedient, even as He did here with Moses. But how does a godly man who has been faithful all of this time, blow it right at the end of his life after so many years of faithful worship? The answer is that he was overcome by the temptation that frustration brought him.

Moses could have made a number of rationalizations to minimize his sin and the responsibility. He could have said, “But God, it’s been a hard time. My sister just died. I’m still mourning her. I’m still grieving her. I’m still hurting because of that.” He could have appealed to the stress that 40 years of hearing the grumbling of the people brought. “Oh God, I don’t know if I can take it another day. I’m depressed.” He could have appealed to the overwhelming nature of the problem. “LORD, there’s no water and there’s 2,000,000 people.”He could have appealed to his brother’s past failures. He could say, “God, last night was a terrible night’s rest. The ground was hard. It was hot in my tent. I didn’t sleep all night long. Don’t I have a reason for being a bit cranky?” But none of these would have moved the heart of the LORD. Moses’ only appeal was to the mercy of God. Nothing but mercy could mitigate his sin. I think this is what Moses did. There are two lessons from Moses’ sin.

Lesson #1: Our responsibility for our sin is not diminished by the circumstances that made us vulnerable to it.

When confessing sin, let us not create a refuge out of the circumstances that made us vulnerable to sin. Yes, circumstances make us vulnerable, but they are not rationalizations. They are not to be part of our confession. You see, if we run to the refuge of our circumstances, we will never run to the refuge of Jesus. Jesus calls us to simply grab the full responsibility and run to Him. “You’re my only refuge and I’m laying it all to You.”

Lesson #2: Temptations that we overcame yesterday may grab hold of us today.

Temptation doesn’t grow less powerful simply because we have defeated it over the course of our life. Age and experience don’t protect us. It’s only the present, active ministry of the Holy Spirit that protects us. We need to walk in the Spirit so that we won’t fulfill the lust of our flesh, so let’s keep alert! Ever keep alert, all the way to the finish line.

**The Discipline of God in our Unbelief**

The focus in this chapter is not on the people’s sin, but on Moses and Aaron’s sin. Now by comparison, it seems like the people sinned far greater, but God holds these leaders to a greater judgment.

***12*** *And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”*

“You didn’t trust Me, Moses. Your disobedience proves a lack of faith. It proves unbelief in your heart. You denigrated My very Person in front of the people to whom I sent you.” How painful this discipline from God must have been for Moses. Notice that Moses doesn’t argue with God. He receives this searing loss from the Lord with humility and faith. He knows that he blew it. Numbers 12 says that

**Numbers 12:3 NAS95** (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)

He was a very humble, dependent man. And he responds now, once he is awakened to his sin, in a humble, dependent way. It’s not with rationalizations. It’s not with minimizations. He just simply allowed the word of the Lord to rest upon him. When God disciplines us, let us not kick against it but let us receive His discipline with a loving heart. It’s because God loves us that He disciplines us. And let us remember that amomentary loss of self-control can rob us of God’s pleasure. While God is gracious, He does not remove devastating consequences that result from our own sin.

So we still ask one final question.Why was God so severe? There are two reasons. First, God cares that we treat Him as LORD; that we obey Him. He cares about our obedience. Unbelief is a dark sin that makes light of God’s sovereign holiness. “You didn’t treat Me as holy,” He says. But secondly, God cares that we, His people, communicate His gospel accurately. Moses was given to this people to communicate His gospel, the hope of salvation to this people. And what Moses did messed up God’s message. How did it do so? I take you back to 1 Corinthians 10. Paul is talking about these events and he says

**1 Corinthians 10:2-4** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

All the people who left Egypt came into Moses’ care. They were connected to him. Now notice this. They ate physical food, but God says, “I didn’t just provide for them physically with manna. That manna was a representation of My spiritual provision so that they would have life in Me; spiritual life all through this time in the desert.” The water that came out of the rock was physical water and it quenched the thirst of their bodies. But he says “that was just a symbol of spiritual water that I gave to My people to provide for their spiritual thirst to their soul.” They drank from a physical rock, but they were really drinking from the spiritual rock. And notice that this rock followed them all through the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. It was this rock that followed them, providing for their spiritual life to connect with God, to connect with worship, to enjoy God, which is what eternal life is all about. And this spiritual rock followed them. Well what or who is this spiritual rock? Paul says this Rock was Christ, the Son of God. It’s the Messiah whom God would send into this world to be born of a virgin. That’s who this rock was. Jesus was present with this people, nourishing them with spiritual food, quenching them with spiritual water, the living water. The Rock is Jesus!

All through the Old Testament, God points forward to this One who is the only One who can feed our soul, who can quench the thirst of our soul, who can give us living water, who can give us the bread from heaven. And all through the Old Testament, He is pointing using dozens and dozens and dozens of pointers to this Person; the One who was promised in Genesis 3, who would ultimately crush the head of Satan and put an end to sin and death once for all. And this rock was intended to be a pointer to who this Person is when He comes, and what this Person would do and how we can draw from this Person, the life that He offers.

The first time, the people were at Rephidim. God said to Moses, “Strike the rock.” Now who is doing the striking? Moses is the human instrument, but it’s God doing the striking. God is commanding it. “Strike the rock. I am striking the rock.” Who is the rock? The rock is Christ. When Jesus came into this world, as a rock, He had to be struck. He had to be struck by God in order to give water to any one of us. If the rock is never struck, the water will never gush forth. And so God put His Son upon a cross and He struck Him. He was smitten of God when our sins were laid upon Him. Moses, at the very beginning of this wilderness journey struck the rock. “It’s the very initiation of the provision of My Messiah for you, a people.”

38 years later, the rock has already been struck. What must happen in order for the people to gain benefit from the water that this rock would offer? Speak to the rock. You see, when the Messiah comes and He dies upon the cross, He dies once for all time. He doesn’t die again and again. That’s what the Old Testament priests had. They sacrificed and sacrificed and sacrificed day after day. No, this Rock, when He is struck, He is only struck once. And that striking opens this provision for all of us. Now, in order to benefit from the blessing of life that Jesus offers us, we need only speak to Him. We just call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved. “Lord, rescue me. Deliver me. Provide water, living water that provides life for my soul.” And Moses, in his frustration, struck the rock. The picture is broken. And God says, “That’s a serious sin. You have inaccurately presented the gospel to My people who need it. And if they don’t hear the true gospel, they won’t benefit because it’s not just about physical water out of a rock. It’s about spiritual drink; spiritual water that provides for our soul. The Bible ends this way in Revelation.

**Revelation 22:17** The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

If you’re here today and you recognize that you don’t have spiritual life in your soul and that Christ offers life…He offers living water that if you drink from Christ, you’ll never thirst again. You’ll be made whole. You’ll know God. Speak to the Rock! Call out upon His name and God will grant you eternal life. And once you have that life and you get thirsty again, what do we do? We keep coming back to that Rock. That Rock follows us and we constantly drink. But we never have to strike the Rock ever again. This Rock was struck once for all. He died and was buried and rose again. Now He ever lives to make intercession and to offer Himself freely to everyone who would call upon Him. So beloved, let us ever fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us speak to Jesus every day. Let us call out for the water that only He can supply. Let us depend upon Him so that our lives might be full. Amen and Amen! He is the Alpha. He is the Omega; the beginning and the end.