

Topic	Grace of a Holy God
Reference	Numbers 20:1-13
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Speaker	Ps Joash

One might find the title of my sermon today more than odd, considering the text that we just read. After 40 years of faithful service, one moment of frustration, and Moses & Aaron are barred from entering the promised land. The land that was promised to Abraham's offsprings.

Where is the grace? In fact, a more natural response towards this story would be 'Why so harsh', 'Why so serious'

- I certainly felt that way after my first few reads.
- I mean, look at what Moses and Aaron had to deal with.

2 Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3 And the people quarrelled 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?"

Okay. Firstly, if there's no water, you shouldn't be shouting at each other. Wouldn't you get thirstier? You are not helping the situation by quarrelling. Secondly, is there a need for a rebellion? I can understand that the situation is desperate. But still, they could have been nice about it, but instead the rebellion arise. In fact, they even said, 'Why have you brought us into this wilderness to die?'

If you live in Subang, your family would have experienced a similar situation. So, you can understand the situation that Moses and Aaron are in. In fact, this was not the first time that the Israelites complained and quarrelled against Moses. They have been doing it for 40 years now.

The beginning of the story says,

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.

This chapter begins with Miriam's death, representing one entire generation that perished in the wilderness. Why? Because of their constant mistrust towards God.

While they were in the same spot around 40 years ago, they sent spies into the land, they did not trust the Lord. The spies said, these people are too big, it is too dangerous for us to invade them. I know God promised us their land and God promises victory, but have you seen those people and they distrust God. They refused to believe in God and God says you spent 40 years here. And even though one entire generation is gone, the new generation has inherited the same traits; complain, quarrelling and rebellion. Israel remains the same. So, it's understandable that Moses and Aaron got extremely frustrated.

Many times, Moses has seen, whenever there is complaining or arguing that God responds with anger and with wrath. But this time, God doesn't get angry, in fact he just provides for the people quietly. He gives into the demands of the people.

7 and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "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."

Naturally, when you're angry or upset, and someone else isn't, you tend to get more upset. You tend to get angrier.

And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him. 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?" 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.

So even though God told Moses to simply speak to the rock, he struck the rock not once but twice and even before that he yelled at the Israelites. He scolded the Israelites. Sure, Moses said something that God didn't ask him to say, and he did something that God didn't ask him to do. But is it that bad, is it so serious that Moses and Aaron will miss out on the Promise Land? The same punishment that was given to the rebellious generation, the same punishment that was given to the people whom Moses and Aaron are angry with, is given to Moses and Aaron.

How upsetting it must have been to receive punishment as the people who you're angry with? You feel unfair, you feel like it is not just. After his 40 years of

faithfulness, don't you think God could have let this slide? Where is the grace? What did Moses do that was so wrong?

How would you end this story?

If you were Moses, and you went through the same situation, how would you write the ending of this story? What would be the conclusion you will write about God? **"On this day, God proved Himself to be petty / rigid / unrighteousness / unfair"**.

What kind of stories do you have?

You may have a story of your own where you wrestle with God, situation in your life that at the end didn't end well for you. Right now, you are still suffering the consequences of those actions and you ask God, why and in your story, you already may have written God is not good, God is not fair. I gave my best, but it did not go well with me. What conclusions did you make about God when you go through this seemingly unfair situation? What did you say about God? What would you say if you were writing this story? Here is how Moses ended it:

¹³These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarrelled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy.

What revelation did Moses receive that lead him to speak about God that way? That after all his rage and the punishment he received, what made him end the story this way? Do you think you will change the ending of your story, your conclusions about God. Maybe we can learn something from Moses today. For the remainder of our time, we'll look at three points

- The severity of sin
- The root of sin
- The grace of God

THE SEVERITY OF SIN

What exactly did Moses and Aaron do wrong that warranted such a serious punishment?

God described it this way – *you failed to uphold me as holy*. Now ways to describe the word 'Holy' or God's holiness seems very impossible. It is a very difficult task, because any comparisons, any similarities that we try to draw from our earthly examples in comparison to the holiness of God, our examples will

seem trivial. Someone once told me that heaven is an eternity spent being in awe of God of the holiness of God. So, any attempt to describe God's holiness, it won't do Him justice. A simple way to describe "holy" is "set apart for a special purpose". It's not to be treated the same way as the others.

Similar color, both shiny, both gets you from point A to point B. But one is not like the other. One is a cheap car while the other is an expensive one. You won't treat them the same way depending on their price when something happens to it. One has been set apart. One has taken a special place in your heart. Upholding God as holy is similar to that: You don't treat Him the same way you treat other things. A more sober way of describing God's holiness is by using extravagant words. We use words like He is awesome, He is magnificent, He is glorious. He dwells in unapproachable light, He is out of this world, He is out of our league, He is one of a kind.

The most straightforward way to describe God's holiness is through this story. Because that's the point of this story. Moses say through this incident, God showed himself to be holy. This is how God describes his holiness. Say something that God didn't ask to say, you can't do that? Do something that God did not ask you to do, even though it yields the same result and by the way you asked me to do it 40 years ago, you can't do that. 40 years of faithfulness, one mistake, you are barred from the promise land because you can't do that? You don't mess with God words, you don't question His actions, you don't overturn His judgement. His ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He is not like us. You don't treat God like you treat others. He is Holy and the consequences for not upholding His Holiness, for not treating Him as holy & displaying to others His Holiness, the consequences are devastating.

Friends, what about us? Do we uphold the holiness of God? Do we treat Him as holy, a special place in our hearts that no one can mess with. No job, no relationship, no hobby, no desire, no dream can mess with the special place that God has in my life. Do we display Him as holy in our lives to the people around us or do we constantly mess with His words. Do we question His actions, and overturn His judgements?

If we are honest with ourselves, we know, we don't nearly treat God as He truly deserves to be treated. We don't give him the honor he deserves. We don't give him the thanks he deserves. Why are we like that? Why don't we treat God as holy?

THE ROOT OF SIN

What caused Moses and Aaron to fail to uphold God's holiness? Why do we fail to uphold God's holiness?

God not only informs Moses and Aaron their sin, He gives the diagnosis too. He doesn't just tell them what they did wrong, He tells them why they did it.

"because you did not believe in me." The reason for your failure to uphold me as holy God says is because you did not believe in me. Now to be clear, normally when we say someone doesn't believe in God, it means that someone doesn't believe in the existence of God. That's clearly not the case for Moses and Aaron because they are talking to Him. They are listening to him. They are communicating with him. They have seen Him. They have seen what he has done. Moses and Aaron believe in the existence of God. They know God exist. What God meant was- *you didn't trust me.*

The root of sin is always unbelief. Romans 14:23 For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. Hebrews 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please God. What led Adam & Eve to disobey God? They believed the serpent rather than God. They were led by the serpent to distrust God's goodness, God's character and because of that they developed a mistrust towards God. That caused them to discount God's word. What did Moses not believe in that moment? God's judgement. "I don't trust you're making the right call here God." To Moses, it wasn't time to show grace or mercy, but strength and wrath. God showed mercy, but for Moses it wasn't a time to show mercy and grace. It was a time to show strength and wrath. Moses didn't trust God's judgment.

So, when Moses said to the Israelites: "Hear now, you rebels" He's passing his own judgement upon the people, not God's judgement. In that moment, Moses replaces God and said "I'll be the judge. Step aside, God" And when Moses said, "shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" He's assuming the position of Provider, Savior. Moses took the place of God. Every one of our temptations stem from our distrust towards God.

- Our finances, when we are tempted to cheat, when we are tempted not to hold up the ethics, to bribe, to steal, we are saying God I don't trust you as a provider, I am not going to do it your way. I will be my own provider. I will do things my way.
- Our plans for the future. We say I don't trust God to give me a great future, I am not even going to consult you. I know what is best for me? I

have what I want, I know my dreams. Thank you very much. I don't trust you as my future planner.

- Sexual temptations. I don't trust God to know what my body needs. God you are God, you are not human, you don't understand what my body needs. You cannot tell me, what should I do with my body. I will make those decisions. I will do what I feel is right for me.
- When we think about future spouse. As Christians we are called to marry in the Lord. I don't think God knows what's going on in my church. Have you met the single guys in there? As a result of our lack of trust, we make up our own rules, we chart our own cost and we become our own masters. We replace the place of God in our lives where we are supposed to regard him as special and holy and we say no thank you, I will be my own God. I will take your place. That's the root of sin, we all do it.

THE GRACE OF GOD

God's holiness is not only displayed through his punishment towards Moses and Aaron, but also through His grace towards a rebellious people. In quarreling with Moses and Aaron, the people were also publicly displaying their displeasure & their anger towards God. When they were quarreling with Moses, actually they were quarreling with God. When they were rebelling against Moses, they were rebelling against God, because it was God's plan all along. In every sense, they were despising the holiness of God. And yet, grace overflowed literally.

11 Water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.

To provide water for that many people and their livestock, a river must have come out of that rock. In spite of their rebellion, in spite of them repeating the mistakes of the previous generation, God offered them grace, abundant grace. But what about Moses and Aaron? Where's the grace towards them?

I see God's grace towards Moses in this verse **"the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord"**. Actually, it is a quarrel between the two sides. Israelites were quarreling against Moses and Aaron and they were quarreling against the people of Israel. Moses when he was writing this story, he not only saw when the people were quarrelling against him, he knew the people were quarrelling against God, but he also knew that when he was complaining, when he was quarrelling with people of Israel he was rebelling against God too. Whatever the Israelites did, rebelling towards God, Moses did the same. That's why he could say "the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord". He included himself in "the

people of Israel". He acknowledged that he committed the same sin as the people he was judging. That's God's grace right there. The grace to see your own sin. I think it is a beautiful gift where we can see our own faults and our own failures before God. I see God's grace in how Moses choose to end the story. Instead of cursing God or being mad with Him, Moses said God showed Himself holy. I believe that much healing had happened in Moses' own heart and his relationship with God. He could look back at this incident without bitterness, and instead, with worship. How could he have done it if it were not for God's grace?

We also see God's grace towards Moses many-many years after Moses had died.

Matthew 17:1 – 3 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Moses missed out on entering the promise land together with the Israelites, but Jesus snuck him in somehow. Through Jesus, Moses entered the promised land years after he had died to meet the promised Messiah, the one through whom all God's promises will be fulfilled. In Jesus he met the promised Messiah. He was in the promised land, he met the promised Messiah. That was God's grace towards Moses.

What about grace towards us?

Through the story of Numbers 20, we see God's grace for us today – cos through this story, we see a glimpse of the cross of Jesus Christ.

In this story we see undeserving people receiving grace, while their hero suffers judgement. Judgement fell on the righteous rather than the wicked. The rock was struck, and water gushed out abundantly. In the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ, an undeserving people received grace abundantly, while our hero suffer judgement. Judgement fell on the righteous rather than the wicked. The difference though between the two stories is that, Moses wasn't truly innocent, he wasn't guilt free. He was sinful. He deserved the punishment, but Jesus did not. He was truly innocent, truly righteous and truly holy. Moses died because of his own sin, Jesus died for ours. This is the gospel. Like the Israelites who lack water in the wilderness, we lack the knowledge of the glory of God. We don't know how awesome He is or how trustworthy He is. And as a result we don't treat him as holy. We don't honor him nearly as much as we should. We are not

thankful enough as much as he deserves. In fact, very often we ignore him, very often, we disregard Him and live as though He doesn't exist. We don't really know the glories of God, and as a result, we fail to uphold him as holy and we rebel against Him. On the cross, Jesus paid the price for our rebellion against God. He took our punishment, so that we may receive God's grace.

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

Now this he said about the Holy Spirit – that whoever places his trust in Jesus as Saviour of his soul and Lord over his life, the Holy Spirit comes to shower him with abundance of graces. How? Jesus says in John 16:14 that "the Holy Spirit will glorify me". The Holy Spirit will show my people my glory. That's how the Holy Spirit gives us abundant grace. The Holy Spirit fills the believer with the knowledge of Jesus' glory and with that he empowers us to keep trusting in Jesus and keep upholding him as holy. Not perfectly, we constantly fail, but by His grace we can uphold him holy sufficiently enough to show others his glory. And then one day, it will come a day because Jesus have done it on the cross. There will come a day where the glory of God will fill the earth, as the water cover the sea. On that day, we will see Him clearly, we will worship Him more fully, and uphold him as holy and we will give him the worship that he deserves.

APPLICATION:

Some of us we don't sense his grace. We don't feel that his grace is that amazing because we have our stories, we have our situations, we have the consequences of things that have happened and we don't feel that God has been gracious to us. Some of you are in a bad spot with God. Things happened, and you've lost your trust in God. I urge you to call out to God again and say God I want to believe again". The healing that you have given Moses, so that he can look back at the situation and say God is holy, I want that. I want that healing.

Some of you are giving in to sin, that when temptations strike you just go with it and you're disobeying God. You are not holding him as holy. Repent, and return. Remember the glories of God, remember the awesomeness of Jesus Christ, remember his love for you and return.

Some of you want to do better. You want to honour & love Him more than you've been doing. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the knowledge of the glory of God.