

Messages from the Wilderness 11 - Be Not Many Masters

In Numbers 16 we come to a new challenge for leadership while traveling in the wilderness. Sometimes, difficult leadership has been compared to herding cats. Leadership has many unenviable aspects but that doesn't always stop people from being filled with envy. There is no shortage of discontent...*except* when people are united in their mission. The people had already proved that they were not united in their mission when they followed the ten spies who gave an evil report. Now, a Levite, Korah and others, in chapter 16 rises up to challenge Moses. Much of what could be said about Miriam and Aaron in their pride and moving ahead of the Lord could be said of Korah. There is a difference in that Miriam and Aaron only wanted to *share* in the role that Moses had. Korah the Levite, and Dathan and Abiram, who were Reubenites *rejected* the leadership of Moses and wanted to present themselves as the leaders of Israel. Let's read through the story this morning to get an understanding of the event.

- First, Korah the Levite and sons of Reuben (who have no claim to the priesthood) rise up with 250 men of renown.

Num 16:1-50 Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*:

2And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

- Next, they complain that they are just as holy as Moses and Aaron.

3And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, *Ye take* too much upon you, seeing all the congregation *are* holy, every one of them, and the LORD *is* among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?

- Next Moses challenges them to appear with censers the next day for the Lord to choose who He will recognize.

4And when Moses heard *it*, he fell upon his face:

5And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the LORD will shew who *are* his, and *who is* holy; and will cause *him* to come

near unto him: even *him* whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.

- Moses offers a counter-complaint against Korah and his company. He condemns them for thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think and trying to seize power.

6This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company;

7And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be *that* the man whom the LORD doth choose, he *shall be* holy: *ye take* too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.

8And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi:

9*Seemeth it but* a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

10And he hath brought thee near *to him*, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

11For which cause *both* thou and all thy company *are* gathered together against the LORD: and what *is* Aaron, that ye murmur against him?

- Moses called for Dathan and Abiram to come up, but they refuse.

12And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up:

13*Is it* a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?

14Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up.

- Moses is forced to defend his integrity.

15And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.

- Moses challenges them to a spiritual "duel" at the Tabernacle.

16And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow:

17And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each *of you* his censer.

18And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron.

19And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.

- In vss. 20-22 Moses intercedes for Israel again.
- God tells everyone to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

23And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

24Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

25And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him.

26And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.

27So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.

28And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for *I have not done them* of mine own mind.

- The men were judged and there would be no mistake about it by virtue of the manner of their death.

29If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; *then* the LORD hath not sent me.

30But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that *appertain* unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.

31And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that *was* under them:

32And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that *appertained* unto Korah, and all *their* goods.

33They, and all that *appertained* to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

34And all Israel that *were* round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up *also*.

35And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

1. They thought they should have had a more important job.

There is a time and place to share in ministry, but lusting after power should not determine what those places are.

Korah and company thought they were just as good as Moses (vs. 3). Being just as good is not the issue. They also thought that they should have had a more important job. The question is not whether you are as good as someone who has a "bigger" job, but where has God placed you? They thought their job was too small (vs. 9). They thought they were too important for the job they had and lusted after power.

Num 16:8-11 And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi:

9*Seemeth it but* a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

10And he hath brought thee near *to him*, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

11For which cause *both* thou and all thy company *are* gathered together against the LORD: and what *is* Aaron, that ye murmur against him?

They wanted to be the boss. It has been said that there is no job too small, there are only small minded people. That doesn't mean that some people have such small minds they are only suited for small jobs. It means that they are not smart enough to see how important every job is. In other words, people with no sense of context, who are small minded, and with no sense of vision only see their jobs as small and significant. No matter how big their job is, they will always think there is something more important they could be doing.

Os Hillman tells the story of a rider on horseback, who many years ago, came across a squad of soldiers who were trying to move a heavy piece of timber. A corporal stood by, giving lordly orders to "Heave." But the piece of timber was too heavy for the squad.

"Why don't you help them?" asked the quiet man on the horse, addressing the self-important corporal.

"Me? Why, I'm a corporal sir!"

Dismounting, the stranger carefully took his place with the soldiers. "Now, all together boys – heave!" he said. And the big piece of timber slid into place. The stranger mounted his horse and addressed the corporal. "The next time you have a piece of timber for your men to handle, corporal, send for your commander-in-chief."

The horseman was George Washington, the first American President.¹

The most important thing you can do is the job in front of you. Even when you think you can see the impact your are making, I assure you that there is an even larger impact by the ripple effect of what you do. Do not forget the impact of the small maid who directed the great general Naaman to the prophet Elisha to receive a healing. Naaman went back to his king as a child of God and we are not allowed to see here on earth the influence he had on the king. Don't forget the small boy with the small fishes who was used to feed thousands. Don't forget that it is the faith of a mustard seed that can move mountains. It is a small man who thinks he is too big for his job. "A narrow mind and a fat head invariably come on the same person." - Zig Ziglar

Rom 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Notice those words: *think soberly*. Don't be drunk with the lust for power. Be sober. Alcohol has been called courage in a bottle that makes you do things you wouldn't do if you were sober. Think soberly. Don't think higher of yourself than you ought to think. Think the way that is becoming of a sober man.

¹<https://betterlifecoachingblog.com/2015/07/10/the-soldiers-the-corporal-and-george-washington-a-story-about-leadership/>

I am not saying to not aspire to do great things for the Lord, just start with doing the job well that God has placed you in.

Col 3:23-24 And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;
24Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Ecc1 9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

There are going to be some things you are not allowed to do by God either directly by His Word or indirectly by the circumstances of your life, but don't let that cause you to demean the place where you are. Let me assure you that there is truly *no* greater job than to share the Word of God and to turn someone to Christ. There is nothing in the world that can take that job away from you. If you need recognition or place before you are willing to share God's Word then you have a problem.

2. They could not appreciate leadership.

It is not that they could not appreciate Moses, it was that they could not appreciate the role of leadership. Moses called upon them to come up but they refused.

Num 16:12-15 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up:
13Is *it* a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?
14Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up.
15And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.

Were they on vacation or something when the ten spies reported about the land of milk and honey and how God judged them for wanting to go back to Egypt? This was only a couple of chapters ago! It just happened! They accused Moses of making himself a prince.

Moses is not the only one who ever

had his integrity in ministry challenged. Samuel had to remind Israel that he had taken nothing from them. Paul defended his integrity in ministry when he was challenged by some in Corinth and Galatia, among other places.

In Corinth Paul pointed out that they would tolerate someone who came with a different Gospel.

2Cor 11:19-27 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise.

20For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour *you*, if a man take *of you*, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.

21I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

22Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I.

23Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

24Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one.

25Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26*In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;

27In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

To the Galatians, he said,

Gal 6:17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Dathan and Abiram complained that Moses had made himself some kind of prince. Moses pointed out that he had not taken one ass from them, which might seem like a curious response. Why an ass? Those who were kings or rulers were known for riding on asses because horses were reserved for use in war. When Jesus, who truly was a king, arrived in the Triumphal Entry He rode upon an ass to signal His peaceful reign as King. When He comes in His Second Coming it will be on a war horse. Moses argued against the accusation of making himself a king by pointing out that he had not taken so much as one ass from them to make himself look like a king.

Make no mistake about it, they not

only rejected Moses' leadership but they disrespected Him as well. Beware of the person who lusts and campaigns for power.

3John 1:9-10 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, **who loveth to have the preeminence** among them, receiveth us not.

10Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church.

Those who are called to ministry find it is something that they have to attend to.

Jer 20:8-9 For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily.

9Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay*.

I read that there are no long-term pretenders in ministry.² I hope you notice that I am careful to say *ministry* and not *leadership*. Leadership is ministry, not an opportunity to be an authoritarian.

1Pet 5:2-3 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;
3Neither as being **lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.**

Leadership is actually a humbling experience. Moses was named the meekest man on earth by God. Jesus, in His leadership, humbled Himself at the Last Supper,

John 13:12-16 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am.

14If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

²Glenn C.
Daman, *When
Shepherds Weep:
Finding Tears of
Joy for Wounded
Pastors*

16Verily, verily, I say unto you,
The servant is not greater than
his lord; neither he that is sent
greater than he that sent him.

3. They lacked a sense of responsibility.

The 250 men who aligned themselves with Korah were men of renown. They were chief men. They were experienced men in that they had witnessed God's hand on Moses and God's hand against Pharaoh. They should have known better. There are requirements for service, for example in those who are deacons. There are two offices in the church, pastor and deacon. Notice what is said about them in Acts 6:

Acts 6:1-4 And in those days,
when the number of the disciples
was multiplied, there arose a
murmuring of the Grecians
against the Hebrews, because
their widows were neglected in
the daily ministration.

2Then the twelve called the
multitude of the disciples *unto*
them, and said, It is not reason
that we should leave the word of
God, and serve tables.

3Wherefore, brethren, look ye out
among you seven men of honest
report, full of the Holy Ghost and
wisdom, whom we may appoint
over this business.

4But we will give ourselves
continually to prayer, and to the
ministry of the word.

The ministry of the deacons is to wait on tables. But people wonder, why do they have to have such spiritual qualifications? That is because the pastors were given the ministry of the Word. The deacons had to be spiritual so they would not usurp the role of the pastors. Pastors have an authority vested in them by the congregation as they acknowledge the call of God on the pastors. All people are under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

Korah and the others did not have a sense of responsibility to the Lord to focus on their job. If they had a problem with Moses, they could have left that to the Lord to take care of. Today, *we* have the place of church discipline to deal with issues, but *they* had God working daily in their midst. They didn't have to wait to see what God would do, He did what had to be done openly in the sight of all Israel. They should have known better than to challenge Moses.

The rebels operated by a spirit of lawlessness. There is a time *and a way* to present a redress of grievances. Those who engage in looting and burning and call it "protest" against the police only demonstrate that they are irresponsible and that the police are very much needed. The moment someone says, "You don't understand how people feel" as an excuse to riot is the moment they have

lost the argument and they don't even know it. If everyone was convinced by that lack of logic then there would be nothing holding back chaos and anarchy. If I were to steal your car you wouldn't want me to say to you, "You have to understand how I feel. I'm so frustrated that I haven't been able to afford a car." Or, "I hit you in the face so you can understand how I feel." *Everyone* thinks their frustrations are unjustified.

Prov 21:2 Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

Prov 12:15 The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel *is* wise.

At the end of the book of Judges, there is this condemnation:

Judg 21:25 In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes.

Rom 1:28-32 And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;
29Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,
30Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,
31Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:
32Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

2Thess 2:7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

Iniquity is a reference to being without law, specifically the law of God and His righteous rule. The spirit of lawlessness started in heaven when Satan tried to stand up against God. The spirit of lawlessness continued in the temptation and fall of man. The spirit of lawlessness has manifested itself throughout the history of mankind. The spirit of lawlessness was present in Korah and company. The spirit of lawlessness will characterize the government of the Antichrist.

In the 2020 riots in Minneapolis, residents pleaded for help as the city

continued to descend into chaos, with one resident, Ryan Griffin, writing on Twitter, "My neighborhood, burning. Median income \$33k. Many have no transit. Our pharmacies, banks, gas stations, restaurants are destroyed. The six closest grocery stores are looted. Our post office is on fire. The nearest gas station is on fire. No response from our city or state."³ And now you can imagine how attractive it will be for a business to open up there. What business owner would say, "This looks like a stable place, I think I'll invest in a business here!"

Jas 3:1-2 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body.

Be not many masters means that you are seeking to make yourself a master or teacher over others. James is warning that you shouldn't be so envious of having the position as a master. The moment you vaunt yourself as an expert you open yourself up to condemnation. At some point, leaders will make mistakes. We have to understand that the very reason we have to be understanding of leadership is because they *do* carry an extra burden when they make mistakes because they bear the ultimate responsibility for those mistakes. If there is actual criminal activity, that is dealt with differently than a leader who has lack of wisdom – that is done at the ballot box. Whatever you think about the things that go on behind the scenes in government, for example, don't fall into the same spirit of lawlessness and give up on your responsibility as a citizen to vote, work, learn and serve God.

1Cor 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Rom 13:13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

In 2017, Sheriff Dale Schmidt in Dodge County, Wisconsin wrote:

When I was growing up I was taught the importance of respect for authority.

When referring to authority, you may think that I am referring

³<https://www.dailywire.com/news/breaking-trump-orders-army-to-ready-military-police-to-deploy-to-minneapolis-after-democrats-fail-to-secure-city>

to law enforcement officers or other government officials, but authority to a child is much more basic than that. Respect for authority begins with respect for their parents.

While it's human nature that children from time to time will disrespect their parents, it is important for children to be corrected at a young age and learn the importance of respect. Children who have a lack of respect for their parents, very often will grow up with a lack of respect for teachers, employers, coaches and law enforcement officers [and more importantly God].

It is also important to remember that parents also help to mold how children will respect others as they watch how their parents act.

In my years as a law enforcement officer I have seen a gradual decline in respect that people show to others and that lack of respect seems to be starting at younger ages. I believe there are a number of reasons for this change in our society.

First, I believe there is an unfortunate false narrative under way in our nation which is promoted by various agendas painting any established authority as being evil.⁴

How so true in 2020 as numerous celebrities and leftists call for attacks on the police!

4. God will lift you up according to *His* will.

God will lift you up according to *His* will. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was lifted up in pride and had to be humbled. Daniel explained that he was going to descend to insanity for seven years and then be restored. He said,

Dan 4:17 This matter *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

Joshua was a faithful spy for Israel who became the general of the host of

⁴https://www.wiscnews.com/bdc/opinion/columnists/society-needs-more-respect-for-authority/article_75dbaa5f-af6d-5fc4-a064-065a91fe1f01.html

Israel and then was elevated to take the place of Moses. Peter had to be taken down a notch or two before he could preach at Pentecost and later to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Prov 27:2 Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.

2Cor 10:17-18 But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

18For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

Concerning the Pharisees, Jesus said,

Matt 23:5-7 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

6And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

7And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Luke 14:10-11 But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

11For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The first way that God wants to lift you up is to lift you up from sin and death and hell. If you have not found Christ and asked Him to be your savior, then you will join with all those who thought they knew better than God how to get to heaven. You need to repent and ask Jesus to forgive your rebellious resistance and make you a new man.