

Messages from the Wilderness 8 - Pride Goeth before a Fall

1. Lifted in pride.

There are various ways to be lifted up in pride such as being boastful and unable to deliver on your claims, thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to and then looking down on others, or having a self-righteous attitude in front of God. These all have some common aspects to them, but the pride issue that we are going to look at today has to do with a resentment and resistance and rebellion against God. Here, pride is going to come in the form of a rebellion against God's man, but it is really against God because God's man only gets his responsibilities from God.

Num 12:1-2 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.
2And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard *it*.

The problem that Miriam and Aaron had was because of Moses having married an Ethiopian woman. There are several possibilities of who this was including Zipporah, the Midianite, or a marriage of affinity in the early days of Moses' life. One thing is for sure...she was definitely black. This is a good opportunity that God obviously does not have a problem with mixed racial marriage because this factor is essentially ignored. Miriam and Aaron might have had a problem, but they don't admit to it in front of Moses and God judges them for their rebellion, treating the mixed marriage as irrelevant. Being identified as an Ethiopian, one of the factors that *maybe* could have been a problem was that Moses had married outside of the Jewish nation. Somehow, this marriage was held against his qualifications for leadership.

Certainly Aaron held a significant responsibility before the people. When Moses met with God at the burning bush, at the end he was fearful of speaking to the people, so God put Aaron *under* him to speak *for* him.

Exod 4:13-16 And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand *of him whom* thou wilt send.

14And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, *Is* not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.

15And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.

16And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, *even* he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

Aaron was not ideally suited for leadership, in my opinion, as we watch him caving in to the people to make the golden calf.

Miriam also had reason to have a sense of responsibility before the people. After the Exodus,

Moses led the people in song. She was identified as a prophetess and led the people in the *response* to Moses.

Exod 15:20-21 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

21And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Although they evidently felt that they were important as leaders, their argument against Moses didn't get very far

Num 12:3-9 (Now the man Moses *was* very meek, above all the men which *were* upon the face of the earth.)

4And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.

5And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

6And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, *I* the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, *and* will speak unto him in a dream.

7My servant Moses *is* not so, who *is* faithful in all mine house.

8With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

9And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed.

In their pride, they had vaunted themselves over Moses who God had appointed as the deliverer for Israel. He affirmed His calling of Moses. To some, God might speak in dreams or dark sayings, but this was not so for Moses. With Moses, God would speak mouth to mouth. This is similar to us talking face to face, but the phrase mouth to mouth is used here and other places in the Bible which speaks of an even greater sense of familiarity. God has established leadership and until God changed the leadership, as He certainly did when it came time for Joshua to take over, Miriam and Aaron were obliged to work within the framework of Moses' administration.

Num 12:10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam *became* leprous, *white* as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, *she was* leprous.

There are various reasons why God might have smitten *Miriam* with leprosy, but what is interesting to me is that God chose to make her as snow. This speaks of the necrotic flesh advanced condition of the leprosy. How fitting it was that if Miriam complained about Moses' black wife that God would say, in effect, "You don't like black? You want white? Alright, you can have white!" Be careful what you complain about!

This reminds me of the story of Johnny Lee Clary. Johnny was a hate filled, willfully ignorant, white supremacist Klansman. On one occasion he and 30 his boys came to harass the black pastor, Rev. Wade Watts at a diner. Johnny had cursed at him, he had burnt a cross in front of Rev. Watt's

yard, and tried to burn his church down. Rev. In return, Rev. Watts treated him with love and kindness. At the diner, Johnny said to Rev. Watts, "Hey boy, this restaurant's for white people only. We don't want you here. So I'm gonna' make you a promise. I promise you I'm going to do the same thing that you do to that chicken. So you think real hard before you touch that chicken."

In response, Rev. Watts reached down and picked up the chicken and kissed it.

You better be careful about how you complain, oftentimes your judgment is directly related to your sin.

Thankfully, in Miriam's case she was healed. God took away her hyper-whiteness and also, thankfully, in the case of Johnny Clary, God took away his hyper-whiteness. It wasn't too much longer before he got saved and became a minister of the Gospel in that very same predominantly black denomination that Rev. Watts was a member of.

In their pride, Johnny and Miriam had something else in common. They each wanted to move in a direction that *they* in their pride thought best.

2. Don't be hasty to move ahead of God.

Don't be hasty to move ahead of God. Being older in ministry, I'd like to make sure to prepare our congregation for the next round of leadership in the day when I am gone from this earth. The next man will most certainly be superior to me in some ways and inferior to me in others. I hope I will be remembered fondly, but some future pastor of the church should be appreciated for the special skills that God has given him. At the same time, the church will have to adjust to work within the limitations of that same man just as we have to work within my limitations. Don't try to race ahead of that pastor, and at the same time, try to keep up with him as he leads the church as God's representative.

The spiritual discipline we have to exercise now, each day and not only in some future scenario, is to not let pride lift us up while we are in our wilderness wanderings in the world and move faster than God. We need to apply this principle not only when it comes to the work of the church, but in other areas of our life. Don't be hasty to move ahead of God. In their pride, this is essentially what Miriam and Aaron did.

Prov 16:18 Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

In their pride, Miriam and Aaron were ruled by their passion. James chapter 1 speaks so elegantly to this situation.

Jas 1:19-21 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Miriam was moving too fast. She need to slow down, be quicker to listen, slower to speak out, and then she might have avoided getting into an angry confrontation. Because of the nature of not thinking clearly when we speak in anger, not being able to form a reasonable argument on the fly

when we are angry, and because of how it is so very, very, very often we find ourselves regretting things we say, we should always assume that it would be better to hold our tongue and back off. There is an admonition in Proverbs about this:

Prov 17:27-28 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: *and* a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.

28Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: *and* he that shutteth his lips *is esteemed* a man of understanding.

James says, "Wherefore." This is a signal that he is presenting a conclusion based on what he had said previously. In Jas 1:1-8, James lays out various prerequisites to avoid passion driving us.

- We need to realize that trials also carry opportunity for blessing
- We need to learn patience
- We need to seek wisdom from God
- We need to exercise faith and stay firm in our trust in God
- We need to be humble
- We need to endure
- We need to be grateful

With this kind of spiritual discipline we can have the strength to hold back our wrath and anger. This is not only true of anger and wrath, but of anxiety in general. Anxiety and anger are related: anger has the added component of vengeance. Both are passion driven.

In our passion, we would like to take the reins like Miriam and Aaron did and hasten things along to what seems like a good idea to us. This is not to say that there is no time to make bold decisions, but the bigger the decision we face, the bigger the consequences we stand to suffer, the bigger our actions are, the more we have to slow down to make sure we do not move faster than God. There are numerous examples of this in the Scriptures:

- After Cain thought it good to offer his own kind of sacrifice, God offered him a right sacrifice to make but instead of waiting on the Lord's sacrifice (sin, or a sin sacrifice), he was moved to jealousy against his brother and killed him
- Rebekah knew that her younger son was to rule over his older-by-seconds brother, but led him to deceive Isaac in haste to receive the blessing. It cost her about 14 years that she could have had with him, and it is possible that she died even before he was able to return home.
- In his passion, Moses struck the rock for water instead of speaking to it and lost his opportunity to enter the promised land
- Joshua moved to fight the battle of Ai without inquiring of God and it was disastrous.
- Uzziah moved in haste to offer an incense in the Temple usurping the responsibility of the priest and was stricken with leprosy.

If some or all of these people and their situations are not familiar to you, then you are one of the very people who needs to slow down, get with God to read, learn, and know His Word.

It is pride that lifts us up to take over control from what God is doing.

Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

3. Don't be hasty in salvation.

Don't be hasty when it comes to salvation. This does *not* mean that people should put off getting saved. It *does* mean that they should not jump to conclusions about what salvation means.

Isa 28:15-16 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

16Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

To make a covenant with death and be at agreement with hell means to jump to the conclusion that your basis for salvation will indeed save you. False, lying doctrine should not be adopted hastily because they will not provide refuge from God's judgement.

Instead, God has laid a foundation stone, which is Jesus Christ, the rock of our salvation.

- He is a tried stone, at least in that God laid out prophecies across the ages to prove Him that He is the Christ.
- He is a precious corner stone in that He is the eternal God, the Son, whose blood would take away the sin of the world.
- He is a sure foundation in that salvation through Him is secured for all of eternity.

To not be hasty in salvation means to not give short shrift to the Gospel and miss the most key elements of the Gospel. Jesus was not just a good teacher, not just a good prophet, not just a good example. He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He didn't come to let us off free. He didn't come to forgive just some of our sin. He didn't even come to just forgive all of our sin. He came to forgive us for being a sinner by taking our punishment of Hell for us for all eternity and transforming us into a child of God. The height of haste is when I offer a Gospel tract to someone and am told, "That's okay, I'm good..." I want to shout out, "No, you are not good."

Rom 3:10-18 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

11There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

12They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

13Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips:

14Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness:

15Their feet *are* swift to shed blood:

16Destruction and misery *are* in their ways:
17And the way of peace have they not known:
18There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Be careful when it comes to salvation. Don't sniff at it and then move along.

4. The more you know God and His Word, the greater your boldness.

At the same time James warns against prideful boasting about what *we* are going to do according to *our* plans, he also warns against doing nothing.

Jas 4:13-17 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

14Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

16But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

17Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

If you know the good that God wants you to do and you don't do it, then it is sin. The bigger problem we face is in not knowing what God says. The more you know God and His Word, the greater your boldness in the Spirit will be.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Don't be in sin and move slower than the pace God has set for you and become spiritually paralyzed. Don't be lifted up in pride and move faster than God's plan for you. Be careful to move at just the right speed.

How do you know what is just right? At least this, do the sure things of God. Be part of the fellowship of God's people. Be part of the work of God. Be faithful and attend to being a disciple. There will be more things to figure out, but that will come in time as you reap the blessings and benefits of serving the Lord with your brothers and sisters. I assure you, if we don't maintain these things, we *will* get off track with the Lord.