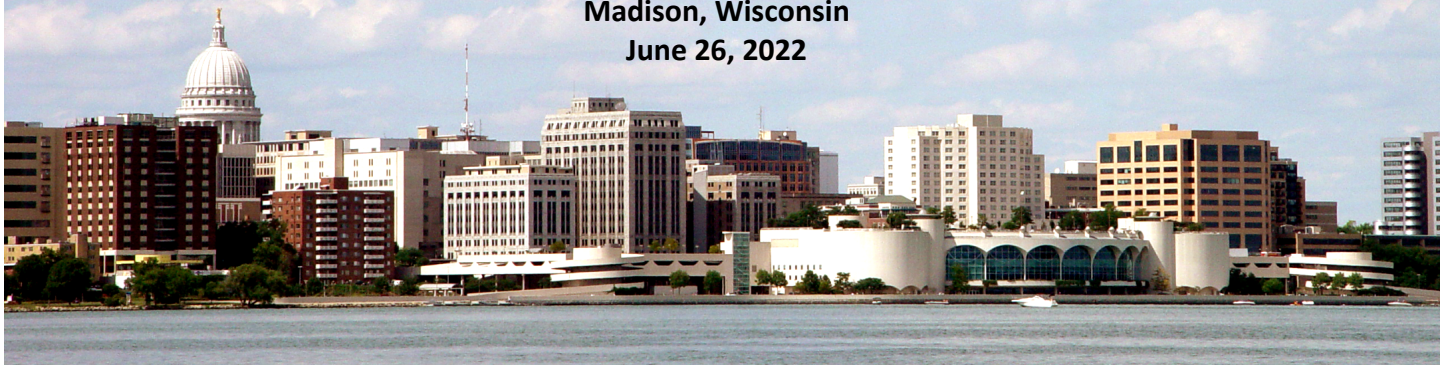


Hurt By Those We Love

NUMBERS 12:1-16 • PART 2

Baxter T. Exum (#1648)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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We'd like to welcome you to the Four Lakes congregation this morning! We are glad that you are here. If you don't yet have the elements for the Lord's Supper, please remember to get those from the table right inside the front door, and if you are visiting with us today, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online. We would really appreciate having a record of your visit with us today.

We are starting today with the good news that although we are lost, separated from God due to our sin, God has sent his only Son as a sacrifice, to save us. Jesus came to this earth and offered himself on the cross, he was buried, but he was raised up on the third day. We respond to what God has done in faith, believing the message, turning away from sin, publicly confessing our belief that Jesus truly is the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. And this morning, we have an example from the Hazel Park congregation in Detroit, Michigan. Our friend, Brian Sherrell, preaches here. Brian and his family have helped out with our summer youth camp in Wisconsin for many years. But a week or so ago they posted on their Facebook page and say, "One of our members, Josie, has been studying the Bible with her mom over the last two years. Josie called this afternoon saying her mom wanted to be baptized. We got together and studied for a couple of hours, and she was ready to put Christ on in baptism for the remission of her sins. Please welcome Beverly to God's family." Great news! And if you are interested in learning more as to why we emphasize this so much every week, we invite you to reach out. Pull me aside after worship today, talk to one of our shepherds, or give me a call or send a message sometime this week. We would love to open the word of God with you.

Two weeks ago, we took some time to think about criticism. Today, everybody seems to be a critic. All of us have opinions, and we often share those opinions online. We tell people when we find a good place to eat, and when something goes wrong, we talk about it. We used this to introduce a time in the book of Numbers, where we find some incredibly harsh criticism spoken within a family – coming from Miriam and Aaron, aimed at their younger brother, Moses. Early this morning, I remembered one of my favorite cartoons, where the preacher is standing in front of the class, and somebody says, "Why study the book of Numbers?" And somebody else says, "36 chapters of self-centered people who whined every time they didn't get their way! Give us something relevant!" Not that any of you have ever done that to me, but Numbers is definitely relevant! The passage is found in Numbers 12 (found in our pew Bibles on page 237), and the passage in Numbers 12 describes something that happens roughly a year after the people leave Egypt. They have crossed the Red Sea, they have

received the Law on Mount Sinai, and they are now three days into their journey, heading for the Promised Land. In Numbers 11, though, the people start complaining about the food. God buries them in quail (dead birds, three-feet deep, for a day's journey in all directions), and that seems to take care of the problem, but just a few verses later (in Numbers 12), we find that the critical spirit has now spread to the inner circle of leadership with Miriam (a prophetess) and Aaron (the high priest) complaining to Moses, upset that God has chosen him (and not them, apparently) to lead the people.

Two weeks ago, we worked through this passage one section at a time, looking at the PROBLEM (in verses 1-2), somehow tied to Moses' wife Zipporah, perhaps a racially-based objection, with the emphasis on Zipporah being a "**Cushite**," which comes across almost as a slur, an insult. This was the criticism, but the criticism behind the criticism is that God was speaking primarily to Moses. The issue here is envy. Miriam and Aaron were envious of Moses' relationship with God. Well, then we looked at GOD'S DEFENSE OF MOSES (in verses 3-9) with God calling Miriam and Aaron out on this, and with God explaining he has a relationship with Moses that these two can't even dream of having. Moses was called by God for a reason. We then looked at MIRIAM'S PUNISHMENT (in verses 10-12), as she is instantly and completely covered with leprosy, which is basically a death sentence – a very slow and painful death sentence. I hope you noticed the artwork on the bulletin board in the entryway. We have an artist's rendition of Miriam covered in leprosy. Aaron, then, is forced to intercede to Moses on behalf of his sister. As we noted two weeks ago, Aaron is now "back in his lane," interceding as a priest, which is his job! And then we closed our study by noticing how MOSES INTERCEDES WITH GOD on behalf of his brother and sister. God hears Moses' prayer, Miriam is restored, and after seven days she rejoins the camp and they move on.

So, this is what happens. Today, I want us to look at the passage one more time, only this time I'd like to apply this passage to our own lives by noticing how Moses deals with this criticism. Today we answer the "So what?" question. But again, let's start by looking at the text itself - Numbers 12:1-16,

¹ Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); ² and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" And the LORD heard it.

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

⁴ Suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, "You three come out to the tent of meeting." So the three of them came out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, ⁶ He said, "Hear now My words:

***If there is a prophet among you,
I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision.***

I shall speak with him in a dream.

***⁷ "Not so, with My servant Moses,
He is faithful in all My household;***

***⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth,
Even openly, and not in dark sayings,
And he beholds the form of the LORD.***

***Why then were you not afraid
To speak against My servant, against Moses?"***

⁹ So the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed.

¹⁰ But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous. ¹¹ Then Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account this sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. ¹² Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!"

¹³ Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "O God, heal her, I pray!" ¹⁴ But the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again." ¹⁵ So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again. ¹⁶ Afterward, however, the people moved out from Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

As we look back at what happens here, I want us to apply this to our lives today by noticing how Moses handles this criticism. Have we ever been hurt by those we love? Have we been criticized by somebody close to us, even by a brother, a sister, a parent, maybe a child, maybe by a member of the congregation? Most of us have probably been there. This morning, then, let's learn from Moses: How do we react when we are hurt by those we love?

I. And I hope we notice, first of all, that Moses reacts with HUMILITY.

Two weeks ago, we noted that little statement in parentheses (in verse 3), ***"Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."*** Most modern translations use the word ***"humble"*** in this passage; others use the word ***"meek."*** The word can sometimes be translated as ***"poor"*** or ***"afflicted."*** It's almost funny to think of Moses being the most ***"afflicted"*** man on the face of the earth! Yes, he was. But in context, it really seems like humility is what is being described here, especially in light of the accusation and in light of how Moses responds to the accusation. In the New Testament, meekness sometimes describes the idea of ***"power under control."*** It describes the idea of having the power to take revenge, but making the decision to not take advantage of that power. And isn't that what we see happening in this passage? Miriam and Aaron, his own brother and sister, come at him with what seems to perhaps be a racial slur against his wife (not once, but twice), they complain about that ***"Cushite woman,"*** and then they finally get to the complaint behind the complaint, that God had decided to speak to him instead of them. Moses is ***"the man."*** Moses is the undisputed leader of God's people. He's leading a nation of 2-3 million people. Moses has some power in this passage, doesn't he? And yet, how does Moses respond to these accusations? I hope we notice that Moses does NOT respond! Moses is quiet. Moses responds with humility. Moses restrains himself. Moses has the power to take some serious revenge here, but he holds back. When somebody attacks our family, that's hard, isn't it? But, Moses restrains himself. He doesn't defend himself here. He could have very easily retaliated. He could have explained. He could have given his side of the story. He could have taken revenge. He could have responded with a counterattack. But, he lets this criticism go unanswered. This is Moses' humility. This is his meekness.

And unlike the way we often think today, meekness does not equal weakness. Sometimes, the hardest thing to do is to hold ourselves back. When we are hurt, especially when we are hurt by those we love, our first instinct is to strike back. And unfortunately, in those situations, it is so easy to say and do some things that we can't take back. It's so easy to hurt somebody so badly that it can never be fixed. When we are hurt, it is so easy to dig up some issue from the past and to throw it back at this other person. Many years ago, I took several personal and

family counseling-type classes as part of my undergraduate studies, and in one of those classes, I remember the professor giving some rules for “fighting fair” in a family situation, and one of those rules was not bringing up the past. In other words, keep the issue the issue. Don’t go digging up the past. Good advice. Don’t go full nuclear on each other. When we are criticized, it’s so easy to unload with absolutely everything we don’t like about the other person, “Oh yeah, well this, this, and this!” We might find some sensitive area of this person’s life and just dig into it. Moses, though, doesn’t do this. He restrains himself. He certainly has the power to take revenge and retaliate, but he holds back. He doesn’t defend himself. He doesn’t list all of his accomplishments. But he is silent.

We think of Jesus, don’t we? As I was doing the research for today’s lesson, I was shocked that Jesus’ silence at his sham of a trial is emphasized in all four gospel accounts. All four accounts describe how Jesus is falsely accused by the chief priests, and in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all four accounts say that **“Jesus keeps silent,”** that Jesus **“does not answer,”** that Jesus **“answers him nothing,”** that Jesus **“gives him no answer.”** In fact, several of the accounts specifically mention that Pilate, the Roman governor, is **“amazed”** by this. Pilate had never seen a prisoner refuse to answer the charges made against him like that. This, of course, was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7, **“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.”**

The apostle Peter picks up on this in 1 Peter 2:21-23 and applies to us by saying, **“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”**

And in the very next chapter, in the context of marriage, the apostle Peter (a married man himself) has some words for husbands and wives in 1 Peter 3:8-9, where he says, **“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”** Sometimes, especially in marriage, the more we talk, the worse it gets. And with his own siblings, Moses seems to come to the same conclusion, so he remains silent.

I think of Paul’s special warning to the young preacher Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24-26, where he says, **“The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”** The preacher must be “gentle” and **“patient when wronged.”**

Are we meek? Are we gentle? Have we learned from Moses here? Have we learned this from Jesus? Are we working on it? The answer comes when we are hurt by those we love. In this case, Moses, chooses silence. Moses chooses humility.

- II. **As we go back to our text in Numbers 12, we notice a second and very closely related response, and that is: The reason why Moses chooses silence is that he LETS GOD HANDLE THIS SITUATION.**

We have the complaint in verses 1-2, at the end of verse 2 we have that ominous reminder that **“the Lord heard it,”** we have the reminder that Moses was very humble, and then we have the Lord’s almost immediate reponse. At the beginning of verse 4, **“Suddenly”** the Lord speaks to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, and he calls them to the tent of meeting. When they come, God arrives in a pillar of cloud and calls Aaron and Miriam to step

forward. At this point, if I'm Aaron or Miriam, I might be a bit concerned (about like getting called to the principal's office). Then again, maybe they thought they were about to get promoted, "God has finally heard our complaining! God is about to exalt us just as he did the seventy men back in Numbers 11." I don't know. But the point for us is: Moses allows God to handle this situation. Moses doesn't lash out, Moses doesn't take revenge, Moses doesn't defend himself, because Moses is leaving this part of it up to God. God will handle this.

And God does handle it. He defends his servant Moses (as we discussed two weeks ago). God's anger burns against them, and Aaron suddenly realizes that his sister Miriam is completely covered in leprosy, and this is very clearly God's doing. This isn't, "Uh, oh. I have this little spot over here. I should probably get that looked at the next time I go to the dermatologist." No, this is immediate and overwhelming. In verse 10, we find that **"Miriam was leprous,"** and not just a few spots here and there, but Miriam herself was **"leprous, as white as snow."** And it's obvious to Aaron that God has done this. This is God's judgment on his sister for what she said back in verses 1-2.

Moses, then, lets God handle this situation. Perhaps Moses is thinking of what God will go on to put in writing in Deuteronomy 32:35-36, **"Vengeance is Mine, and retribution.... For the LORD will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants...."** Perhaps Moses realizes that in time, God has a way of working things out. Moses, then, doesn't defend himself, perhaps because he knows that God will handle this. This same thought, by the way, is repeated in the New Testament, in Romans 12:17-21, where Paul says,

17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. 20 "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

These are some of the most difficult verses anywhere in Scripture! The instruction, though, is so valuable! We don't take revenge, because God understands every situation completely. He is able to judge both thoughts and actions, and the Lord God never makes a mistake. Moses, in his humility, leaves the judgment to God. We think back to something Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:5-7, when he says, **"...and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."** Isn't that what Moses does here? In humility, he withholds judgment himself, and he turns this over to God.

And what an example for us! Often, when we are attacked, it's best to just turn it over to the Lord. This doesn't mean we can't defend our lives or our families, but in many cases (especially with harsh or unjust criticism) it's best to simply let something go, to let God handle it. Obviously, if it is a legitimate criticism, we may need to clarify and work through it, but in a case like we have here in Numbers 12 (an unjust and painful criticism from somebody in our own family), it's best to just let it go. This is not my problem; I'm going to let God handle this.

III. Well, this leads us to one more lesson from Moses this morning, and that is: MOSES RESPONDS BY REPAYING EVIL WITH GOOD AND WITH MERCY.

So, not only does Moses not retaliate, not only does Moses let God handle this situation, but we also find in this passage that Moses repays evil with good and with mercy. When Aaron comes begging for help, this is not how

many of us might have responded, "Oh, I see! You are covered in leprosy, and NOW you want my help! Maybe you should have thought about this before you whined about me having such a special relationship with God." Obviously, Moses could have really taken advantage of this situation. But instead (in verse 13), Moses cries out to the Lord, saying, **"O God, heal her, I pray!"** Moses sees that his brother and sister are sincere in their regret, and he uses his special relationship with God to beg for his sister's healing. In fact, he uses the very relationship with God that Miriam and Aaron had just been criticizing! So, not only does he not pray for vengeance, not only does he not pray for their destruction, but Moses prays for a blessing on his sister. He prays for healing. Instead of praying for vindication, he begs God to bless the person who had just attacked him.

Haven't we already seen this in Joseph? His brothers beat him up and sell him into slavery. Years later, they come to him, begging for food, and instead of retaliating, Joseph provides. What an amazing example! And don't we see this in Jesus? In Luke 23:34, as he is being nailed to the cross, the verb Luke uses indicates that Jesus was continually saying, **"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."** Over and over again, even as he is on the cross, **"Father, forgive!"**

And I don't know if we've thought about this, but it's possible Moses reacts like this (with prayer instead of retaliation), because he knows what it feels like to have leprosy, doesn't he? Back in Exodus 4, as he is first deciding whether to obey God's call to go back to Egypt, God tells Moses to put his hand inside his cloak, he does, and when he pulls it out, his hand is covered with leprosy. God tells him to put it back again, he does, and it comes out perfectly restored. Moses knows what God is able to do, and God is using this power to teach Miriam a lesson. The point is: Moses prays for healing, not revenge. He repays unjust criticism with mercy and love. Miriam does pay for her insurrection, but Moses responds with good. And it seems that Miriam learns her lesson here. Never again is Miriam described as rising up against her brother. In fact, she is not mentioned again until we come to a very respectful reference to her death (in Numbers 20:1).

I believe Aaron also learns something here. He's been on the critical spirit of this thing, but from here on, Aaron is on the inside, and he will be on the receiving end of some rebellion from here on out. We think about the incident with the twelve spies, and in Numbers 14:2, the text says that **"All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron."** And then, a few chapters later (in Numbers 16), Korah and his people **"...assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?'"** It's a bit interesting to me that Korah's complaint against both Moses and Aaron is almost identical to Miriam and Aaron's complaint against Moses, "Who do you think you are to speak for God?" Aaron, then, transitions from the criticizer to the one on the receiving end of the same criticism. Moses, though, responds with mercy and grace. Instead of retaliating, Moses responds with kindness and mercy.

Conclusion:

I don't know what all of you are going through this week. Chances are, we may have a bit of tension with somebody, maybe even somebody we love. We might have some issue that never seems to get resolved. Maybe we are frustrated over something somebody has said to us. This morning, we've had some reminders from Moses. When his own brother and sister rose up to criticize his leadership, Moses reacted with HUMILITY. He had the power to lash out, he had the power to retaliate, but Moses held back, not returning evil for evil. Secondly (and very closely related to this), Moses let God handle this situation. And God took care of it. I'm not saying that God will strike our enemies with leprosy, but God does have a way of working things out. As Paul says, we are to leave room for the wrath of God (Romans 12:19). And finally, as we come out on the other side of it, Moses has showed us how to react with grace and mercy. And thankfully, this is how God responds to us.

When we turn to him in in repentance, when we turn to him in obedient faith, he also responds with good and with mercy. We have a way of hurting him again and again, but God still loves us, and God still welcomes us home. I hope this passage has been an encouragement.

Before we prepare for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for your word. Thank you for reaching out to us through scripture. This morning, we are especially thankful for your servant Moses and for his example in handling this conflict with Miriam and Aaron. We pray that we would learn from his humility. But more than anything, we are thankful for how Moses points us to the coming of your Son. Just as Moses steps in to intercede for his sister, so also Jesus intercedes for us. Thank you, Father! In just a moment, we plan on singing about your grace, and mercy, and pardon, given to us at Calvary. We pray that we might be willing and able to extend the same forgiveness to others.

We come to you today in the name of your Son, Jesus, our King. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com