

Learning to Restrain

(Numbers 20:1-13)

Yearly Theme: “Kindness is... Action”

Series Title: “Kindness in the Wilderness”

February 12th, 2023

Something to think about:

So, how do we use our freedom? Are we prone to use it selfishly in order to cater to our desires and whims? Or do we use our freedom to serve others. And what about restraint and self-control? Do these things have an effect on the freedoms we’ve been given? Though we have the freedom to respond to circumstances and situations with anger, rage, and hatred toward others, what are the consequences when we react these ways?

Today we come to a passage of Scripture from the book of Numbers in the Old Testament. Again we pick up the narrative during the time the Israelites have been punished to wander in the wilderness for 40-years just outside of the Promised Land. The passage that we will be taking a closer look at today is only one instance of many when the Israelites grumbled and complained against GOD and Moses due to the harsh conditions of the wilderness they were condemned to wander. In Numbers 20 we see, however, not only were the people complaining about not having water, we see Moses and Aaron – in their anger toward the people – disobeying GOD’s command to bring water to the people by speaking to a rock. Let’s take a closer look:

Numbers 20:1-13 (NLT),

In the first month of the year, the whole community of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. While they were there, Miriam died and was buried.

² *There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The people blamed Moses and said, “If only we had died in the LORD’s presence with our brothers! ⁴ Why have you brought the congregation of the LORD’s people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock? ⁵ Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, and no water to drink!”*

⁶ *Moses and Aaron turned away from the people and went to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where they fell face down on the ground. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to them, ⁷ and the LORD said to Moses, ⁸ “You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, speak to the rock over there, and it will pour out its water. You will provide enough water from the rock to satisfy the whole community and their livestock.”*

⁹ *So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD. ¹⁰ Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. “Listen, you rebels!” he shouted. “Must we bring you water from this rock?” ¹¹ Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So the entire community and their livestock drank their fill.*

¹² *But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!” ¹³ This place was known as the waters of Meribah (which means “arguing”) because there the people of Israel argued with the LORD, and there he demonstrated his holiness among them.*

Here’s the takeaway:

Key Point: “Self-control is the discipline to follow GOD’s commands rather than our personal impulses.”

Have you ever been in a fight with someone and your words were pretty heated and the telephone rings? Notice how quickly you can manage your anger! You’ve got a lot more control over your anger than you think you do.

There are so many things that test our patience, that it’s easy to give in to our baser sinful instincts. Instead of refusing to respond to situations impulsively, many people – when pressed – react in anger to situations that necessarily need a cool head. Moses (and Aaron, his brother) found himself in this situation. Let’s look at the details of this particular narrative this morning:

- **Miriam (Moses’ and Aaron’s sister) died and was buried.**

Numbers 20:1 (NLT), In the first month of the year, the whole community of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. While they were there, Miriam died and was buried.

- **The people rebelled against Moses and Aaron.**

Numbers 20:2-5 (NLT), ² There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The people blamed Moses and said, “If only we had died in the LORD’s presence with our brothers! ⁴ Why have you brought the congregation of the LORD’s people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock? ⁵ Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, and no water to drink!”

- **Moses and Aaron rebelled against GOD in their anger toward the people.**

Numbers 20:9-13 (NLT), ⁹ So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD. ¹⁰ Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. “Listen, you rebels!” he shouted. “Must we bring you water from this rock?” ¹¹ Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So the entire community and their livestock drank their fill.

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Something to take home:

If we consider the story of Moses and Aaron in this passage, we see the consequences of using our freedom in our anger to disobey GOD’s commands. What we convince ourselves is righteous anger oftentimes is not. And rather than follow the commands of GOD when situations become unbearable, we all too often err on the side of “sticking it to the man” so to speak. When we surrender our lives to Christ, we not only become new creations, but we become slaves to Christ rather than the sin that so easily entangled us. When we become slaves to Christ we learn what true freedom really is as we take on His nature as His image bearers. It’s only then that we reflect the true nature of GOD to the world around us through the love we have in our hearts.

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