

## Moses & Aaron – Lessons Learned – Numbers 16:41-50

If you've just joined us, we're in the middle of a series called Lessons Learned . . .

Based on 1 Cor 10:11 where it says that the examples and events of those who have gone before us in the OT, were *written down for our instruction*

The implication being that we should learn the lessons from them, in their day, in order to live the life in ours – the life God requires and desires for us

### Intro

And having looked at 7 different men and women thus far, we now turn our attention to Moses and Aaron

And to do so, I want to look at *3 different passages* this morning, the first being Nu 16 That's where we'll spend the bulk of our time

I preached from this passage about 3½ years ago, and decided to return to it, b/c I want to talk to you about reaching out to those outside our church . . .  
And this passage is a *very* compelling example to that end

The second passage is Mt 25, and that's where I'd like to begin – we'll get to the third one in 2 Cor, a little later

My goal is to help you see each of these passages in light of the others, so that the HS can and will grip your heart with the truths that beg to be applied

And the first connection point between them is that Mt 25 tells us *what* to do, while the others, tells us *how* to do it Mt 25:31-40

Jesus is speaking in this passage of his future return, and his separation of the righteous from the unrighteous . . .

As shown by their involvement in the lives of the least of these

And in doing so, he makes one main point, and that is . . .

### **Get involved in the lives of the least of these (Mt 25:31-40)**

That's the lesson here – the clear implication

That if you're righteous, it will show by your association with those who are hungry, or homeless, or poor, or sick, or imprisoned

5 different categories of the *least of these* as Jesus says it

Least, not in terms of their worth, but their plight; Their *situation*, not their value

And he says that the righteous, i.e. those who are right w/ God – get involved in their lives  
It's one of the marks of their life  
They come alongside them, help them, love them, and provide for them

- That's *what* we should do – straight from the mouth of Jesus  
Not an option, but an obligation – a duty of delight  
Something that as redeemed people, we *should* do, and should *want* to do  
B/c so near and dear are *the least of these* to the heart of Jesus, that blessing *them*, is blessing him  
That's the what

And with that as our foundation, the *how* comes from the example of Moses and Aaron in Nu 16:41-50

- God has just told the Israelites that they would wander in the desert for 40 years due to their lack of faith to enter the Promised Land  
And the people responded by grumbling, complaining, and even rebelling against the leadership of Moses/Aaron  
All of which created a massive need among the people, that Moses and Aaron got involved in (Nu 16:41-50)

*But* – clues us in, that contrary to what we might expect after God takes the lives of 250 Israelite leaders due to their effort to usurp the authority of Moses and Aaron . . .

All was not well in Mayberry

*The cloud* – the cloud of God's presence; his visible manifestation at that time

In order to get involved in the lives of the least of these, you have to first . . .

### **• Take notice of their plight (v41-43)**

V43 says that *Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting*  
IOW they took notice

They didn't ignore the people; They didn't sit back and hope they just disappeared  
They didn't spend months discussing the best approach to the situation  
And they didn't harden their heart toward them, just b/c they were doing something wrong

They got up from their proverbial couches, stepped outside their proverbial comfort zone, and took notice of what was going on

- If we're going to live up to the standard of righteousness that Jesus talked about, we have to stop insulating ourselves from the outcasts of society  
We have to stop avoiding them *socially*, and we have to stop removing ourselves from them *geographically* . . .  
Just b/c we don't want to see them, and feel guilty or uncomfortable around them

Shame on us – we don't take notice b/c they're out of sight, out of mind; *intentionally*  
And if they aren't, we're often too calloused to care anyway  
Or too cynical to think our help will do any good . . .  
Or too self-absorbed to notice in the first place

- We must stop *ignoring* the least of these among us, and start taking *notice* of their plight  
It's time to *see* the crowds like Jesus did – gut-wrenching as it is  
It's time to open our eyes to the suffering and hardship and struggle and hopelessness of those right here in our own community  
Take notice of their plight

And then . . .

### **Pray for their salvation (v44-45)**

V44-45 – *The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” And they fell on their faces.*

They were looking down the barrel of God's wrath, and instead of getting out of the way – they *fell on their faces* (45b)  
Which was, and still is, a posture of humility and desperation, from which to plead for God's mercy

And while we don't have the words of their prayer recorded here, there's a similar situation in ch14 (**Nu 14:19**), where Moses says to God . . .

*Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love*

And given the similarities, I gotta believe it was the same prayer here

They were desperate for God's mercy, and desperate for the people's *salvation*\*\*\*\*\*

- When was the last time you were so concerned for someone, that you fell on your face to plead for God's mercy on their behalf?  
When was the last time you prayed for the salvation of someone in desperate straits?  
That God, in his mercy/grace, would so grip them by his greatness/goodness/holiness . . .  
That they would come to the end of themselves, and surrender completely to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

That they would be filled with the power/presence of the HS in them, to live the life to which God has called them

That they would experience the freedom of knowing the truth . . .

No longer imprisoned by the bondage of false belief, or the shackles of sin that so easily entangle

When was the last time?

If it's recently, chances are you're already involved in their lives

B/c you *cannot* pray for their salvation without an overwhelming compulsion to get involved in their life to make it happen

And that's the point

Pray for their salvation, and you'll get involved – it's unavoidable

### **Meet their needs (v46-48)**

Read v46-48

The *censer* was a small bronze/gold bowl, that was a means of making a sacrifice portable

So by adding fire/coins from the *altar*, the sacrifice . . .

And *incense*, to symbolize their desire that it be pleasing and acceptable to God . . .

Aaron was able to take the altar to the people, instead of expecting dying people to come to the altar – hello

And by doing so, he made *atonement for them* – i.e. he provided a means to appease and avert God's wrath, so that they could be right with him; so that they could be saved  
Assuming of course, that the people appropriated or applied the sacrifice to themselves  
They had to trust God's promise that he would forgive their sins and relent of his judgment, if they considered the sacrifice their own, and did so with a right heart

- Does any of that sound familiar?  
I hope so, b/c that's exactly what Jesus did 1500 years later; Once and for all  
He provided the means for *our* forgiveness, as we look by faith to *his* sacrifice in our place  
Resulting in the appeasement of God's wrath toward us for our sin

Aaron's intercession with a *censer* in the middle of the *people*, is a picture of Christ's intercession on the *cross* in the middle of *history*

- What's more, it's an example of what we're to do *now*, in the middle of our *communities*

That's the gist of **2 Cor 2:14-16**, the third Scripture that I want to tie together here

This is where Paul, I have to believe with this event from M&A in mind, said . . .

*Thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession [leads us into the midst of the people], and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.*

Just as Aaron spread the fragrance of the sacrificial incense among those in the Israel . . .

So too, God, through us, spreads the fragrance of Christ to people *everywhere*

B/c we are the aroma of Christ, we *are* the incense

Offered to God as *living* sacrifices among those who are perishing – those dying of the “sin plague”

And as such, we will be a fragrance of death to those who reject Christ . . .

And a fragrance of life to those who receive him\*\*\*\*\*

This episode in the M&A's life, is a picture of the cross, a picture of our life in Christ . . .

And a picture of what it means to get involved in the lives of the least of these

- But it's not just a *spiritual* thing  
Yes, people are dying of a plague called sin, which they're responsible for  
And yes, they need the forgiveness of God to avoid its consequences

But they're also suffering the ill-effects of that sin, due to the fallen world in which they live, or the poor choices they've made

IOW they have both *spiritual and* physical needs

And it's incumbent upon us to meet them both

Trying to meet someone's spiritual needs without meeting their physical needs, is futile

Nobody cares about the water of *life* when their throat is parched

Nobody cares about the *bread* of life when their stomach is growling

By the same token, meeting their physical needs without addressing their spiritual needs, is like treating the symptoms without addressing the cause

It might make them feel better for the *moment*, but they're still facing hell for all eternity

We must meet their needs by filling both their stomachs *and* their souls

### **Sacrifice your wants (v46-48)**

In order to get involved in the lives of the least of these like Jesus said, you have to be willing to sacrifice your wants – there's no other way

It's not explicit here, but I have to believe that Aaron wasn't real keen on leaving the security and protection of the tabernacle . . .

To stand in the middle of a bunch of sinners who hated his guts . . .

And risk being swept away in the plague, right along with them

He had to sacrifice *his* desires, for *God's* desires; And his *wants*, for their *needs*

- So often, we want to get involved in people’s lives, but only at our convenience  
Only with the time we have left over; Only with the energy we can spare

But it doesn’t work that way – the least of these don’t operate on your schedule  
If you’re going to get involved in their lives, you have to sacrifice your wants

You have to stop praying *parenthesis* prayers

God, feed the hungry (but don’t ask *me* to serve the meal)  
God, help those in prison (but don’t ask *me* to visit them)  
God, stop abortion (but don’t ask *me* to speak up)  
God, change the inner city (but don’t ask *me* to live there)  
God, help disadvantaged kids (but don’t ask *me* to tutor them)  
God, help refugees get settled (but don’t ask *me* to get involved)

Oh, I know – we don’t really say that, but it’s implied; And we can’t do it  
As followers of Jesus Christ, we don’t have the luxury of praying parenthesis prayers  
We have to be done with asking God to meet needs and change situations, apart from  
using us to do it  
And we have to sacrifice our wants to make it happen

### **Waste no time (v46-49)**

Moses told Aaron to go *quickly* to the congregation (46)  
And v47 says he *ran into the midst of the assembly* – he responded with urgency

He didn’t walk; He didn’t pass go; He didn’t collect \$200 . . . He ran  
He didn’t hem/haw wondering if he should get involved in *this* plague, or wait until the  
next one  
He didn’t try to figure out if this would be a good fit for his gifts  
He didn’t say he’d pray about it – which is code for “no, but I don’t have the guts to  
say so”  
He didn’t form a committee to analyze it to death  
Or draw a flow chart to make sure it was going to be done in most efficient way possible  
before *he* got involved

He wasted no time, and *ran into the midst of the assembly*  
Why? B/c people were *dying*; And they still are

- Do you realize how many people are hurting/dying physically – and need a tender touch,  
*now*?  
How many are dying spiritually – and need to hear about the love of Jesus, *now*?  
How many are broken emotionally – and need a friend, *now*?  
How many lack the basic necessities of life – and need them, *now*?

We must get involved in the lives of the least of these, as if their life depends on it  
And waste no time – b/c it does

**Video (*How Will God Use You?* Produced by *Connect By Indie Atlantic*)**

To help you answer that question, there’s a Local Outreach **insert** in your bulletin that  
I’d like for you to take a look at  
There are 41 different opp’s through 11 different org’s on this insert, to get involved in  
the lives of the least  
From Youth Hope and Lydia Home, to King’s Harvest and Prison Ministries – there’s  
literally something for everyone

That’s not to say that every outreach opp is a mandate – it’s not  
Nor does it mean you have to be involved on a daily basis  
It might be weekly, or even monthly for you – that’s okay (**summary**)

But do *something*

B/c so near and dear are *the least of these* to the heart of Jesus, that blessing *them*, is  
blessing him