

Sermon on Numbers 20:1-13 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Numbers 20:1-13

God's way is the best way!

Happy Father's Day!

As I have been studying this text this week, I couldn't help but think of Moses here as the father figure to Israel. The wise and God-connected leader. The one to lead the people into adventure. That's what Dads are supposed to do.

But another image of Dads better matches what we see of Moses in Numbers 20. Dads doing projects without instructions!

Now my father-in-law is here this morning so I shouldn't tell stories of working alongside him! But there are plenty of examples over my many years of helping my Dad with projects, brake jobs, assembly-not-included experiences to have learned that he preferred to do things without instructions. He also hates asking for directions...

As I matured there were probably times I wondered what step of the instructions we were on, but the instructions were nowhere to be found. And a few times at the completion of a project, things weren't exactly to the schematics, but they kind of worked. Not exactly as it should be... but good enough "for government work!"

This isn't just for Dads I suppose. Going through life thinking "kind of works" is good enough. Settling for what we can accomplish on our own or by replicating what once worked and we miss out on what could be. What is meant to be.

We are in church so of course we see this through a lens of faith. How we trust God, how we listen to Him, and how we follow his commands.

We see this in the end of the wandering in the wilderness and water from a rock.

Numbers 20. We have been following Israel's journey, out of slavery on the way to a land that is perfect for them. Promised by God for their good. But along the

way, they choose fear over faith, they reject what God has provided, they grumble like spoiled children that need that one more toy... And a whole generation will miss out on the promise because of it.

Left to wander for forty years just shy of the land flowing with milk and honey. All along the way, God has shown himself to be good. To be a provider. A merciful Father.

Directly before our text we saw the need to be clean and a way of purification - ashes mixed with living water. And now in our text we have living water. That which satisfies.

But someone fast-forwarded. Decades skipped and we arrive at the closing of forty years of journey.

Miriam and Aaron die in this chapter. The change of a rebellious generation to one that will experience the promise.

As always, God provides. But in the provision we see truth to carry us through.

God's way is the best way.

Two movements. Need for water and a new way.

Need for Water

There was no water for the congregation... and as has happened time and again they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. Leadership gets the heat in hard times! They grumble about the lack of water... and if you have ever been really thirsty you understand this.

They are pros at grumbling. Complaining that life doesn't match expectations. And it always includes some jibe about going back to Egypt... to slavery.

This is not new. Think of it, they have been doing this now for forty years. If my kids ask for something more than three times in ten minutes I am ready to smite all of them... But these rebels never learn. But this is not a story about the congregation's rebellion. It's about Moses and Aaron's trust.

Faced with need, Moses and Aaron went to the lord for help. Good move.

Based on history they approach him. He has always provided because of his covenantal faithfulness. 40 years of proof.

Numbers 20:7–8 “and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [8] “Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.” (ESV)

Aaron’s staff, the memorial, that which budded and produced fruit, proof of the priesthood. The reminder of God’s provision carried before the people.

God will meet the need for water with a rock. Miraculous

11b: “water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.”

But Moses misses something. So significant it will keep him from the promised land. God says to tell the rock and yet Moses strikes the rock twice.

He presumes upon history. God has given water from a rock before and in Exodus he told Moses to strike the rock.

“a mirror image of a similar event that had taken place in the very first year of their wandering (Exodus 17). At that first occasion in the wilderness of Sin (a similar sounding, yet different location from that in 20:1), the people quarreled with Moses and put the Lord to the test because there was no water for them to drink (Exodus 17:2, 3). They charged Moses with bringing the people out of Egypt simply to make them die of thirst in the wilderness (v. 3). However, on that occasion the Lord instructed Moses to bring the people to the rock at Horeb and to strike the rock there; water would flow from the rock for the people to drink (Exodus 17:6). In that first test Moses did exactly what the Lord told him to do, and the needs of the people were graciously met (Exodus 17:6). On this second occasion he had been told to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8). This deviation from carrying out God’s instruction led to Moses’ being condemned not to bring this assembly into the land (v. 12).”

God gave a new direction and Moses ignored it. Takes it upon himself to deliver. And it is counted as disbelief.

He lays into the people for being rebels and for dramatic effect hits the rock with the staff.

Moses isn't wrong about the rebellion of the people, but it is his trust in self that misses the mark.

The problem is that Moses was putting himself in the place of judge to make that declaration though the Lord had not authorized him to do so. The Lord told him to extend his mercy and grace to the people in giving them water in a way that demonstrated unequivocally that the source was God; instead, Moses set himself up as their judge.

Numbers 20:12 “And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” (ESV)

How we do this. Spiritually - because everything about us is spiritual - we trust in ourselves, to accomplish, to prove, to earn our reward. Or we look to other things to satisfy the thirst we have deep within us. Good things, family, jobs, resumes (showing the kids all the buildings I work in in D.C.). Sexuality, rightly expressed and experienced within the safe boundary of marriage.

Unhealthy things. That which numbs us, drink, chemicals, food, images. Sex, exploitative, opposed to what God says is best.

When we are made to believe in Him, we believe in self or lesser things to provide. Idols.

Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, says of idolatry: “It is anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”

When it comes to right standing with our Creator - salvation - we think and live as if all we need is enough good to outweigh the demerits of rejection of God and his way. Or even thinking God just closes the gap after I have tried my hardest...

Won't cut it. It will all leave you wanting.

“Considering that it was likely struck with Aaron’s budded staff (v. 9) and that this rock represented Christ who supplies us with a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:13–14; cf. 7:37–38; 1 Cor. 10:4), Moses’ sin was especially grievous. By saying and doing what he was not instructed in order to provide for God’s people, Moses was taking to himself a right reserved for God alone. Yet we see God’s grace here in that he nevertheless supplied the water to his quarreling people.”

It is the holiness of God shown here that gives us hope. Because he is bringing provision in a new way.

The new way

God hasn't changed. He provides. But the way people experience refreshment changes... This is pointing somewhere, to an ultimate promise.

“You might think that a leadership team of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron would be a tough combination to improve upon, but by the end of this chapter their story is effectively over: they are dying, dead, and dead. We need a better leader than Moses, someone who will not get frustrated with his people and judge them. We need someone who will show his people grace and effectively deliver them in their hour of need. The good news of the gospel is that a leader who is better than Moses has come in the person of Jesus.” ID

We hear of this beautifully during a feast commemorating God’s provision in the wilderness. Hundreds of years after this rock-striking encounter in the Zin, the people would gather in Jerusalem and sleep under the stars. And on the final days of feasting the priests would pour out abundant water on the altar in the temple.

Jesus is there for the feast.

John 7:37–38 “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. [38] Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (ESV)

That water from the rock was Christ. God’s promise, his provision to his people, to all who will believe.

“The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus Christ was actually part of this story in Numbers 20: he was the spiritual rock that accompanied his people through the wilderness and from which they drank (1 Corinthians 10:4). In Jesus Christ, God himself took the blows that we deserved for our rebellion. He is the righteous High Priest who was stripped not because of any failure on his part but to enable him to take our place on the cross under God’s curse. From him flows the living water that we need to slake our thirsty souls and to transform our lives increasingly into his image.” ID

He takes our place and gives us His so that we can have life. Abundantly. Not that it will be easy but that it will be good.

Relying on Jesus keeps us secure forever. Always accessible living water.

He is our way out of idolatry.

1 Corinthians 10:1–14 “For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, [2] and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, [3] and all ate the same spiritual food, [4] and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. [5] Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

[6] Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. [7] Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” [8] We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. [9] We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, [10] nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. [11] Now these things happened to them as an example, but

they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. [12] Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. [13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

[14] Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” (ESV)

Jesus is how we move beyond the things that leave us wanting. Jesus is the one that satisfies.

On vacation we were with some dear friends that have always been a bit suspicious about our theology... as if they had been told long ago that Calvinist were bad and I was one so... Each time we are together I feel like I am explaining what is most important to us and I told them I don't have much care for labels in middle-age. But what I do want is Jesus. I don't want anything I don't need Jesus for.

I can't do what is needed apart from him. I can't find hope. I can't satisfy my thirst, apart from Jesus.

He is our rock. Providing himself. He is where our thirst is met.

“When we despair of ourselves in our ongoing struggle with sin, we are acting as if we are our own deliverers. What matters, however, is not how we judge ourselves but how God the Father judges us — and he declares us “Not guilty,” for Jesus' sake. In spite of our sin, he calls us “saint” and “my child,” because he sees us through Jesus and has committed himself to deliver us to himself holy and pure on the last day. It is his verdict that counts, not our own, and he is our gracious judge and faithful deliverer.” ID

Father knows best. **God's way is the best way.** And his way is Jesus.

Listen with Trust: Be anchored in his word. It is our manna, our map, our light. Don't be hearers only but doers as well.

See Jesus: Our living water. Our salvation. Our hope. He is for you. He is satisfied. And life with him is a journey home, to the promise. Walk with people that will show you Jesus. Trust him. Thrive.

Numbers 20:13 “These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy.” (ESV)