

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ² “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the LORD heard this.

³ (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) ⁴ At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you.” So the three of them came out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, ⁶ he said, “Listen to my words: “When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. ⁷ But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” ⁹ The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.

¹⁰ When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; ¹¹ and he said to Moses, “Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. ¹² Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother’s womb with its flesh half eaten away.”

¹³ So Moses cried out to the LORD, “O God, please heal her!” ¹⁴ The LORD replied to Moses, “If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back.” ¹⁵ So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back. **This is God’s Word for God’s people.**

Dear Children of God,

What makes you better than me? Have you ever spoken those words or at least thought them? I suppose they could be said in the right context but that’s not usually the case. When a person throws out the question, “What makes you better than me?” it is usually a challenge and a fight is about to begin. That’s what was going on in this portion of scripture as Miriam challenged Moses but we can learn a lot from Moses’ reaction to her challenge. It wasn’t what we might expect and probably not what we would have done.

But Moses reacted the way he did because he, **“Served God in all Humility.”** As we consider this portion of scripture we can see, **“The Consequences of Setting Aside Humility,”** and **“The Blessings of Serving in Humility.”**

I. As Miriam and Aaron question whether Moses is qualified to lead the people we see some ugly qualities. First we see judgment as they pick on Moses’ Cushite wife – implying that he should have chosen “one of their own” as his wife. Then they take a poke at his authority by claiming that God has also used them as his spokesperson. While some of the things they said were true, their reasoning was just a mask for their jealousy. They had a sinful pride that was rearing its ugly head in sharp contrast to Moses’ humility. Moses didn’t fight back. After all, God had appointed Moses to this position and so Moses left it up to God to confront Miriam and

Aaron. And Miriam and Aaron probably didn't realize it but in their challenge against Moses they were really challenging God.

It didn't take long for God to react, **“At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you.” So the three of them came out.”** God was going to deal with this quickly and directly. **“Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam.”** The Lord was there visibly in the form of a cloud. This was a familiar sight to Moses, Aaron and Miriam because the Lord led them in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. But to be summoned personally by God had to be a frightening thing but Miriam and Aaron stepped forward. After all, what else were they going to do.

There were no witnesses and no trial. The presence of God and his summons already were a sign of their guilt. God knew what was in their hearts and the words that came from their lips. There was no hiding of the facts and no way to cover up what they had done.

God was going to set them straight about his relationship with Moses. **“He said, “Listen to my words: “When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD.”** Moses wasn't an ordinary prophet. He was God's spokesman and the leader of God's people but God's relationship with Moses was different – it was special. God spoke to him face-to-face and Moses' face would reflect the glory of God after these chats. God spoke clearly to Moses so that he understood exactly what God was saying. Sometimes God's Word was a mystery to the unbeliever and needed the help of the Holy Spirit to give understanding to his Word but not so with Moses. Moses saw the form of the Lord. What a special privilege to see God and not die.

Then God asked the question that left no doubt Miriam and Aaron are guilty, **“Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”** Miriam and Aaron knew all these things about Moses but had not “connected the dots.” Can you imagine the terror they felt as they realized that in challenging Moses they had been challenging God himself? They were guilty standing before God. And then we are told, **“The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.”** That's what disobedience brings – God's anger. There wasn't anything else to be said. They were guilty and so God left to remind them that sin brings separation from God.

Sometimes people say that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. I think this incident points out that God hates sin and sinner because sinful actions deserve God's wrath. The result of their sin, **“When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy.”** Sin has its consequences and God's judgment on Miriam was leprosy which brought a separation from God's people and it drove home the truth that the wages of sin is death because Leprosy was an ugly – disfiguring death sentence.

It would have been very easy for Moses to step back and say, “See, you got what you deserved. It serves you right.” You might even think he would have been justified in berating

Aaron and Miriam, but remember he was a humble man, serving God in all humility. He left it to God to correct Aaron and Miriam. God's judgment was swift and we might even consider it somewhat harsh. But Miriam and Aaron had defiantly attacked God by attacking the authority of Moses. It was no secret that God had called and appointed Moses for this special task of leading his chosen people. He had given Moses Aaron and Miriam to assist him in this difficult task, but when they challenged Moses they were challenging God himself. What a foolish thing to do.

You might be thinking to yourself that you would never do something so foolish as to defiantly challenge God's authority, but think about that for a moment. Have you ever had a time when you said to yourself, "I know it's wrong but I'm going to do it anyway." If you are honest with yourself, I think every one of you would have to admit that at one time or another you have defiantly sinned against God. You knew better but did it anyway and you know what, God would have every right to bring swift and harsh judgment against you too. But in many cases you received God's mercy instead of his wrath. Jesus suffered God's wrath for those times we sin and that includes those defiant sins we commit too. God's judgment is swift and harsh, but it was against his Son as he hung the cross.

Thank God for sending Jesus to take our punishment and to bring us forgiveness instead of what we deserve. Thank God for giving us another chance to serve him in humility. And as we serve in humility we receive the blessings of such service.

II. Miriam and Aaron weren't bad people. After all, they were part of God's chosen nation but they were sinners. God in his mercy called them to repentance through the judgment that came on Miriam. Aaron recognized his sin and quickly responded to this call to judgment. He turned to Moses and pleaded, **"Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed."** He recognized Moses as a special mediator for God's people and Moses' reaction was to cry out to the Lord, **"O God, please heal her!"** God heard this cry for mercy and he was merciful to Miriam. Immediately she was healed but there was a consequence to her sin.

She was confined outside the camp for 7 seven days in accordance with the laws set forth for purification. But even there we see God's mercy because he had the people stay in the same location and not move until Miriam was able to rejoin the group.

God is merciful to us too. He has given us a special mediator. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."** (1 Timothy 2:5) When we come confessing our sins, Jesus pleads our case before God the Father that the punishment for our sins has been paid and thus, we receive the verdict "not guilty."

But don't forget that many times our sins have consequences. Our sin is forgiven but it may have done damage to or destroyed a relationship. Sometimes the consequence of our sin gets us thrown into jail. Sometimes the consequence of our sin causes us to lose our job. Sometimes our sin might bring harm to ourselves or to others. But never forget that your sin is forgiven and God gives you strength to bear up under the consequences of your sins.

Remember that Moses didn't always live a perfect life. He sinned daily just as we do but he served his Lord in all humility because he was a forgiven child of God. As a child of God he

didn't want to do anything to jeopardize his relationship with God. He tried to live his life guided by God's Word and looked to God for forgiveness when he fell short.

May we, too, follow the example of Moses – looking to God to guide our lives and to forgive us when we fall short. May we take every opportunity to serve God in all humility. Amen.