



Parkway Fellowship

Waze • Accident Reported Ahead • Numbers 20:2-12 • 03/04/2018

Main Point

When things happen that take us off track, we need to remember to let God lead us through or around the obstacles we face in our lives.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever played a game that required being blindfolded and led around?

How did it make you feel to be lead by someone else?

Throughout this series we have been talking about the WAZE app and how it parallels our dependence on God. I wish I depended on Him to lead my life like I depend on WAZE almost every time I get behind the wheel of my car. And the great thing about WAZE is it will guide you around the accident reported ahead. And the most awesome thing about God is that He desires to lead us through or around the “Accidents” reported ahead in our lives.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Numbers 20:2-5.

The event described in this passage took place in the 40th year of the Israelites wandering in the desert. They had lacked water before (Ex. 17:1-7). Still, this was a serious matter; the people complained that they were going to die in the wilderness.

Do you think the Israelites’ quarrel with Moses was only about the water or something more?

Explain.

The people ascribed evil to the place where God had guided them (v. 3). In addition, the fruit they complained about not having in verse 5 is the very fruit the spies brought back from the promised land 40 years earlier (see Num. 13:23). This indicates that the Israelites still lacked faith in God.

| Ask a volunteer to read Numbers 20:6-11.

Contrast and compare this passage to Exodus 17:1-7. On a previous occasion, God had commanded Moses to strike a rock to provide water for the people (Ex. 17:6). Discuss how God's instructions were different this time.

What did Moses do right in this situation? What did he do wrong?

Moses and Aaron demonstrated humility in the presence of God (v. 6). Moses took the staff and assembled the people, just as God had instructed (vv. 9-10a). Then it all went wrong from there (vv. 10b-11).

Moses failed after having barely left the very presence of God. What does this tell you about sin? If you can lose your cool after being in the presence of God, what can you do to avoid it? Is it even possible?

| Ask a volunteer to read Numbers 20:12.

What difference does it make whether Moses spoke or struck? Doesn't the end justify the means?

In what way did Moses fail to trust God to show His holiness in this situation (v. 12)? Do you agree or disagree that at the root of every sin is a lack of trust in God? Explain.

Moses' disobedience in striking the rock made it appear that he was the one who caused the water to gush out. His question in verse 10 ("Must we ... for you?") implied that what was about to happen was something that Moses and Aaron were doing for the people. This incident reminds us of two dangers: (1) trusting in our methods rather than in God, and (2) failing to give God the glory and credit for everything good in our lives. God doesn't share His glory.

| Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 32:48-52.

The time for Moses' death had come. God instructed Moses to go up on Mount Nebo, where he would die. The Lord recalled the event recorded in Numbers 20 and again reminded Moses that own sin prevented him from entering the promised land with Israel.

Does the consequence handed down to Moses seem fair to you?

When we read this, we're tempted to object and say, "What? Just for that one little act of disobedience? And yet all those rebellious people got to go in? That doesn't seem fair!" Moses' outburst might have been a small thing in the scheme of things, but small things can have big consequences.

According to verse 51, what two things had Moses done to disqualify himself from entering the promised land? What are some ways that believers today fail to treat or represent God as holy before others?

| Ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 34:1-5

These verses relate the fulfillment of the command God issued Moses in Deuteronomy 32:52. Moses went up on Mount Nebo as God instructed. Though Moses would not enter the promised land, God allowed him to see it. Even God's discipline is mitigated by His grace.

What do you think ran through Moses' mind as he viewed the promised land?

The reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remind us that the promised land was not mere geography, it was the fulfillment of a promise that God had made beginning six centuries earlier. The promise testified of God's faithfulness. While the consequence of sin robbed Moses of an experience, it did not hinder God's bigger plan nor change the fact of His faithfulness to His people.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In what ways do we fail to give God the glory and credit what everything good in our lives?

How might focusing on the past keep you from making your life count today?

What big results could come from small acts of obedience, especially if repeated?

Pray

Lead your group in prayer, thanking God for His grace that is greater than our sin. Ask Him to help the group members identify areas of disobedience in their lives that are hindering their participation in what God is doing in the world today through His church. Ask that they would live each day in awe of the glory and graciousness of God.

Commentary

| numbers 20:2-12

Numbers 20:2-5. Water is a precious commodity in any setting but perhaps even more so to a nomadic people in the wilderness, which we should understand as desert rather than as an area of thick vegetation. This was

not the first time this particular issue had surfaced. In Exodus 17:1-7, that generation of people also complained about a lack of water. Moses interceded on their behalf, and God miraculously provided water from a rock. This younger generation surely had heard the story. Apparently they did not learn from it.

Once again the people cried out, “There is no water to drink!” (v. 5). Their survival was at stake, and because of that they considered their current location an evil place. They were so distraught, they expressed a death wish: “If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord” (v. 3). What a declaration! In essence they were saying they believed they would have been better off suffering a judgmental death from God than to be where they were.

Whether initiated by a few surviving members of the former generation or the younger generation of Israelites at large who had been influenced by their forefathers, the people questioned Moses, saying, “Why have you led us up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place?” (v. 4). They juxtaposed Egypt, the place of enforced servitude, against “this evil place.” The people saw the present circumstances as a time of death rather than a time of life. How shortsighted they were. Could not—would not—the Lord God who had delivered them and provided for them once more give them just what they needed?

Scripture instructs us to learn from the past. (See Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11.) The Israelites were not learning from the past; if they had, the earlier miracle of receiving water from the rock would have encouraged them to trust God. Instead of embracing that most recent experience, they resorted to idolizing a past they thought was better than it actually was. What they did does not make sense, does it? They forgot the more immediate past of blessing, which could have brought hope to their present, to cling to a distorted view of a longer past that was crippling them.

Up to this point Moses, and to a lesser degree Aaron, were the targets of the complaints: “they assembled against Moses and Aaron. The people quarreled with Moses” (vv. 2-3). The accusations were personal. “Why have you brought the Lord’s assembly ... Why have you led us up?” (vv. 4-5). The problem, however, was not a leadership deficiency but a “followership” failure. Oblivious to the possibility that they bore any responsibility, they blamed their leader and appeared to have forgotten about God altogether.

Criticism stings, especially when it is public and has no basis in fact. The common reaction is to strike back, often immediately and with full force. To Moses’ credit, he did not respond that way. The way the text reads, Moses and Aaron said nothing but “went from the presence of the assembly” immediately to “the tent of meeting,” the holy place representing the presence of the Lord (v. 6). Moses had set up the tent of meeting after the fiasco of the golden calf: “Anyone who wanted to consult the Lord would go to the tent of meeting that was outside the camp” (Ex. 33:7). Demonstrating the highest humility in the presence of the holy, Moses and Aaron actually did not enter but came only “to the doorway of the tent of meeting” where “they fell down with their faces to the ground” (Num. 20:6).

The Lord acknowledged their presence: “The glory of the Lord appeared to them” (v. 6). Glory is God’s manifestation of Himself with power. His presence and His power are inseparable. God had permitted Moses to have one personal experience of the glory of the Lord that was so phenomenal that his own countenance radiated for days to come. (See Ex. 34:29-35.)

Whether Moses or Aaron spoke is not evident; neither is it important. “The Lord spoke” (v. 7). The Lord knew what had taken place. He needed no explanation. He was more than prepared to respond, so He needed no advice. His instructions were simple.

“Take the staff” (v. 8) likely referred Aaron’s staff, which had been incorporated into the tent of meeting. The Lord had instructed this be done “as a sign for the rebels, so that you may put an end to their complaints before Me” (Num. 17:10).

“Assemble the community” (v. 8). Whereas earlier the community had assembled against Moses and Aaron, Moses was to initiate a gathering of the community. The criticism had been public, so would be the response.

Exactly what Moses was to say when the Lord told him to speak to the rock is not known. Nevertheless, the instruction was specific: “Speak to the rock while they watch, and it will yield its water” (v. 8).

Again without any recorded dialog, “Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence” (v. 9), a reference to the tent of meeting. Further complying with the Lord’s instructions, “Moses and Aaron summoned the assembly in front of the rock” (v. 10). Apparently Moses knew, or God directed him, to which rock. So far, so good. Moses was doing just what God had told him to do.

From here it turned bad. For the first time in this account, Moses spoke. Oh, that he had not! Oh, that God had told him exactly what to say! Left on his own, frustrated at the turn of events, perhaps dealing with a build-up of emotion, Moses cried out, “Listen, you rebels!

(v. 10). What he said may have been true, but the emotion that appeared behind the words was not becoming to him and was not an accurate representation of the spirit behind the Lord’s action.

Nothing in the Numbers passage indicates the Lord was angry with the people. However, the summary of this incident given in Psalm 106:32-33 notes the people angered the Lord. Regardless of whether God was angry, Moses’ anger is nothing more than an unrighteous outburst. He was, as the psalmist assessed, so “embittered (in) his spirit that he spoke rashly with his lips.”

Moses had more to say: “Must we bring water out of this rock for you?” (v. 10). He said nothing about what God would do. He offered no encouragement to this new or changing generation that would lead them to repent for their complaints against Moses and Aaron or for their lack of trust in God. “Must we ... for you?” His question—for which Moses did not likely expect or want an answer—implies that what was about to happen was something Moses and Aaron were doing for the people.

We have seen what Moses did that was good—he consulted the Lord. Then he turned to do something that was bad—he addressed the people harshly and bitterly. Next it got ugly. In defiance of the instructions the Lord had given Moses “to speak to the rock while they watch (v. 8), he raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff” (v. 11). The Lord said nothing about striking the rock. That was the instruction for the previous occurrence (Ex. 17:6) but not this one. How presumptuous of Moses to think he could modify God’s instructions and that God would not hold him accountable.

Moses “struck the rock twice” rather than only speak to it. Nevertheless, “a great amount of water gushed out.” The flow was not just a trickling stream but was a supply sufficient enough that “the community and their livestock drank” (v. 11). Whatever explanations some Bible interpreters may give for the presence of the water beneath the rocky surface, one conclusion is certain: God in His miraculous grace provided water for them when there was none. Whether from natural or supernatural means, all blessing comes from a God of grace to whom we are to give the glory.

The people reveled in the water supply, an outpouring of God’s blessing. Moses and Aaron, on the other hand, faced an outpouring of God’s judgment. The people did not know that Moses and Aaron had breached God’s instructions, but God did. Our pragmatism may say, What difference does it make whether Moses spoke or struck? The results were achieved. After all, the end justifies the means. We must not fall into that trap when we are dealing with the things of God. Twisting, using for our own purpose, or outright disobedience of God’s Word has its consequences.

The charge the Lord leveled against Moses and Aaron was You did not trust Me. Moses and Aaron had usurped God’s authority, making the achievement appear to be theirs rather than His. Furthermore, the Lord’s instructions had been to “assemble the community” and “to speak to the rock while they watch” (v. 8). The Lord had a reason for bringing forth water from the rock in the sight of the Israelites. The experience was to lead them to bring glory to God and to remind them that God was able to provide for them if they trusted Him. Moses would not be with them always; God would.