

December 15, 2019

GOD REQUIRES

Numbers 20:1-13

INTRODUCTION

When people look at you what do they see? Perhaps a better question is “*Who* do they see?” Do they see you or do they see the Lord in and through you? This may appear to be a minor question but the truth is that, in the text we are treating, it mattered immensely. Though we are in Christ we should always be mindful that the Lord is calling us to be imitators of Him in all situations and circumstances. The fruitfulness of our witness and life depend on our continual obedience.

THE TIMING (Number 20:1-5)

Leadership is difficult for many reasons. Less considered is the fact that leaders often shoulder problems and difficulties either unseen or not clearly understood by those they lead. As a result they are often left to shoulder things alone. This was Moses’ experience in this text. He had lost his sister just a short time earlier and in the middle of this season of grief the people gathered and piled grief upon grief. They know he has lost his sister but, in truth, they do not care at this moment and it does not matter if Moses is ready, willing to deal with their anger and accusations. They gave it to him anyway! The problems were stark, to be sure, but their faith in God was wavering and, as such, their confidence in Moses was as well. The problem? “*There was no water...*” (Number 20:2). In spite of Moses being a mere human being who, like them, was serving the Lord, the absence of water was...you guessed it - *his fault* (Number 20:4-5). Moses had lost his sister and was grieving. Now the people are telling him he is a failure of a leader. Bad timing? Yes! But in leadership, God requires us to lead the most difficult of people in the most difficult of times even when the idea of leading is far from our hearts.

THE DIRECTIONS (Number 20:6-8)

Leaders must be humble. They must be able to lead the unruly at times and, in the face of being “beaten up” they must express nothing less than servant leadership. Moses is hurting from the loss of his sister. The people are murmuring and blaming him for their current predicament. Most leaders would explode, go on vacation, self-justify or even quit. Moses not only did neither of these but he and Aaron did something extraordinary: they fell on their faces “*face down before God*” (Number 20:6). And when they fell down the glory came down (Number 20:6)! Before God will speak His word to Moses He gave Moses His presence. What an incredible truth: God sees the tired and worn saint and will strengthen them with His presence when they humble themselves before Him. God now directs Moses in how he is to handle the situation: “*speak to the rock*” (Number 20:7). What should be noted is that Moses’ current challenge – the murmuring of the people over his leadership – is actually the ingredient in which God will display His wonder and works for this rebellious lot! In essence leaders must be encouraged in knowing that the darkest, weakest and loneliest moments are often gifts from the Lord in which he demonstrates His power and glory through us. *If we speak to the rock!* (Number 20:8).

THE FRUSTRATIONS (Number 20:9-11)

Sober-mindedness is key for leadership. However, Moses did not succeed in this at this moment. Clearly agitated by the murmuring of the people and their accusations against him Moses gets angry and chastises: “*Listen, you rebels*” (Number 20:10)! They accused Moses and attacked his character and now, he is accusing them and attacking their character! In responding this way he lost the Lord’s place in the process saying, “*Must we bring water out of this rock for you*” (Number 20:10). Not only is he seeing

himself and Aaron as the providers of the water, but the staff, a visible representation of God's work through him, he uses to beat the rock (Number 20:11). He is now doing things his own way! God said "*speak to the rock*" (Number 20:7) but Moses seems to know better than the Lord and strikes the rock. Leadership is difficult because leadership *always* demands self-leadership first. If we lose this capacity to remain calm and sober minded at all times we too, perhaps more quickly than Moses and for minor reasons, will nose-dive into emotionalism. The only recourse to such departures is to lead people to God's place, in His way and exclusively for His glory. When we don't, the alternative just might lead to disaster.

THE FALL-OUT

Leading God's people means leading like God. Robert Murray McCheyne is famed for having stated "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness." Leaders need to be holy to model the Lord before His people and if they are to see great success for the Lord. The Lord told Moses "*you will not bring this assembly into the land I have given them*" (Number 20:12). This was not because of what the people had said or done to him, but what he did not do before the people: "*demonstrate my holiness in the sight of the Israelites...*" (Number 20:12). It does not matter what happens to us at the hands or lips of others, God will hold us accountable for how we respond to such accusations and treatment. If we fail to demonstrate His holiness we will forfeit a fruitfulness that only holiness births. What a shame to lead people to a place we are barred from entering (Matthew 7:22; 1 Corinthians 9:27).