

September 23rd
EVEN MOSES MESSES UP

“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.” And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. 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.”

NUMBERS 20:8-12

What does ministry success look like? Is it about results? Is it about reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it about encouraging believers with God's Word? There's plenty of large churches that look successful from an outsider's perspective, but looking into the dirty laundry of the church exposes an unhealthy culture. Smaller churches can look unsuccessful, but an insider's look can reveal instead a healthy and vibrant congregation. Size doesn't equal success; health and faithfulness do. Here in Numbers 20 we get a glimpse of what appears like grand success. Water gushes from the rock to give thirsty people water. What an amazing victory! At least it appeared that way...but God knows the truth. What is God teaching us here?

What did God command Moses and Aaron to do here in this passage? “Tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water.” What does Moses do? Instead of speaking to the rock, he strikes the rock. Now, this may not be new information to you, but if you dig a little deeper, you'll uncover more to the story. “Here now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” Moses doesn't just strike the rock in anger; he substitutes himself for God here. Who wouldn't be mad at the Hebrews? In fact, Moses has become angry with the people several times already, including breaking the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments. What's distinct here is the holiness of God. God tells us exactly that as He gives discipline to Moses. At first glance, the discipline seems a little harsh to our unholy eyes. But God. God always upholds His holiness. All you have to do is look at Leviticus 10 with Nadab and Abihu to see this played out. “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel...”. Shall we bring water out of this rock was a prideful statement that brings God's work equally with the work of man. It's a dangerous assumption that Moses makes in his anger and frustration here. Make no mistake about it...the work is always God's work. He changes hearts. He accomplishes His work.

Men, this is a humbling and sober warning for all of us. We like to take credit. We want people to see us as men that are workers that provide for and help others. Do you see how Satan twists God's call for man to work? God creates man to work, but Satan twists that work for God's glory and makes it about man's glory. We don't often see it because it's a subtle shift of our worldview. How does this play out in the local church? Consider the slow fade of prayer in local churches. Why should people focus on prayer when other programs are important. Sometimes in local churches, prayer becomes an action of beginning and ending a gathering rather than an important appointment to keep with our God. What works practically comes before what is important for health. Individually, we as men can analyze our lives and look for success that becomes about accomplishing goals. Of course, there's nothing wrong with goals. The problem becomes when the goal dwarfs the process of becoming like our King. God isn't concerned about what looks successful to us. The word He uses in the Scriptures is faithfulness. Men, look at Moses' example here to see that he was successful in getting water out of the rock, but was unfaithful to His God because He took credit for it. Will we heed the warning here and live to be faithful today?

Spend some time thinking about what faithfulness to God looks like in your job, your family, and your church. Ask God for more grace to live faithfully before Him.

For Further Reading: Matthew 25:14-30