

Numbers 20

Good evening and thank you again for joining us. Would you turn in your Bibles to Numbers 20 please?

We're more than half way through our study in this incredible book, and we've gone relatively quick, often times studying 2-3 chapters at a time. But tonight, we're going to camp out in chapter 20, and spend significant time in just a couple of verses.

The dictionary defines the word frailty as 'the condition of being weak and delicate'.

And although no one readily stamps themselves as being frail, we all have those moments in life where we are indeed frail. And Moses, was no different.

The title of tonight's message is PRONE TO WANDER

Before we begin let's ask for the Lord's blessing.

PRAY

It's very rare that I ask the worship team to play a specific song. In my years I can only think of a handful of times.

But tonight, I specifically asked Mark, and he graciously agreed, to play that timeless hymn, "Come Thou Fount".

That ageless hymn turns 263 years old this year. And as is true with all old hymns, in our day and age its common to sing words that no longer captivate us, which is unfortunate.

A careful reading of the words in most older hymns will reveal that they are not only overflowing with great theology, but they also have a story behind them which is compelling, and sometimes tragic. Such is the case with Come Thou Fount.

Robert Robertson was only 22 yrs. old when he composed this hymn. When he was young, he endured a rough childhood-his dad died young. He was such a troubled kid he was sent off to London to learn a trade in barbering, hoping that would set him on the right course.

Yet that didn't deter Robert Robertson's appetite for sin-at a young age he began to drink and carouse. He was headed on a path of self-destruction.

That is until he heard the words of the famous preacher George Whitfield. Robert Robertson was converted as a result of Whitfield's preaching, and he fell deeply in love with the one who loved him even more-Jesus. Robert Robertson immediately began studying for ministry.

He became captivated, he couldn't get enough of the Bible, he immersed himself fully in the scriptures. He clung closely to those who mentored him and taught him.

3 years after writing the hymn Come thou Fount, at the age of 25 he was called to the Baptist church in Cambridge where he ministered effectively. Crowds increased and his popularity grew. Before long, Robert Robertson was a name known all across the city of London and beyond.

I'm going to let Richard Seume, the former chaplain of Dallas Theological Seminary finish the tragic story of Robert Robertson:

"His serving at the Baptist church was the beginning of his great popularity, and the beginning of his lapse into careless ways and his eventual succumbing to his own carnality. He lived in that condition for many years.

It came about, in the old coaching days, a lady seated on a stagecoach was reading a little book with evident enjoyment. 1

page of that volume held special appeal to her, and so she consulted it from time to time.

She then turned to her fellow passenger, a gentleman she presumed may be acquainted with the subject of religion. She held the page toward him, and pointed to the words she had been reading, and asked him what he thought of it. He read the section that said

O to grace how great a debtor

Daily I'm constrained to be

Let Thy goodness like a fetter

Bind my wandering heart to Thee

Prone to wander Lord I feel it

Prone to leave the God I love

Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.

The stranger read no further-he turned his head from it. The man sought to engage the woman in something other than these words, but she was not to be denied.

Venturing another appeal, she told the man the benefits she had received from that hymn, and expressed her admiration for its message.

With that, overcome beyond the powers of controlling his emotions, the man burst into tears. 'Madam' he said, 'please. I'm the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give 1,000 worlds if I had them to give, to enjoy the feelings now, that I had back then.'"

I'm sure by now you've guessed that the man on that stagecoach was Robert Robinson, the author of Come Thou Fount.

How tragically ironic he seemed to prophesy his own failure!
Prone to wander Lord!

And so he did, and so he died in defeat at the young age of 55.

Robert Robertson's name is added to the littered graveyard of countless Christians, men and women who were used by God greatly, yet a wandering heart dramatically altered their life, and brought shame upon God's name.

We've seen it happen recently with the greatest apologist of our generation, Ravi Zacharias. How could a man who touched so many lives, including my own, in such profound ways be caught up in such sin? Didn't we all feel like we got punched in the stomach when his actions were brought to light? I don't know why I was caught so off-guard, I've seen it happen a lot, so have you.

Sadly, it would not take us much time at all to come up with a list of names, who's hearts wandered from God, and it marred their lives forever.

And this is what we see tonight with Moses.

Now as we begin, one of the challenges we sometimes have when going through the scriptures is recognizing the time that passes between verses, chapters and books.

We find ourselves upon one such example in our study tonight.

In Numbers 20, 38 years of wilderness wandering has now taken place. Decades of circling through the barren wilderness have elapsed, all because of the Israelites refusal to enter the promised land.

Lets pick up the scene.

1 Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; The Israelites are right back where they started 38 years earlier. Kadesh was the same border town from which the spies were sent out into the land. Now the nation returns to the scene where the first generation buckled under the weight of unbelief and fear.

...and Miriam died there and was buried there.

Moses' sister Miriam has died. A review of her life would remind us of her courage in assisting Moses and his parents back in Exodus 2-she saved Moses' life. Miriam also led the nation of Israel in praise in Exodus 15.

But Miriam's legacy was marred for her rebellion against Moses back in Numbers 12.

2 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. The older generation of unbelief was almost dead, and now the younger generation is starting to act like the older unbelieving generation. Sound familiar?

3 And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! 4 Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? 5 And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink." Remember in Exodus 17 the exact same situation occurred shortly after the first generation left Egypt. They came to a place that had no water supply, and the people began to complain to Moses. In response, God told Moses

to strike a rock. Moses did, and life-sustaining water gushed out of a lifeless rock.

But rather than trust God to do what He's done before, the people complain again.

Now they are in the wilderness, which was not a fruitful land. But remember God was still providing manna miraculously every day. And one day they will make it to the promised land, but they have to journey through the wilderness, trusting God.

And look how Moses responds to the people's complaints

6 So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them. Moses and Aaron realized how serious this was. With this rebellious attitude, the new generation would be just as unbelieving, and untrusting in God as the old generation was, and they too would die in the wilderness.

7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." God's promise is even more amazing than Israel's doubt. Despite their unbelief, God continues to show the nation mercy.

In verse 8, God tells Moses to speak to the rock, and water will pour out to quench their thirst. Back in Exodus he struck the rock.

9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. Step 1-good

10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; -pause here-step 2-good

Moses began by doing exactly what the LORD had told him to do: Take the rod, and gather the people of Israel, but that's where Moses' obedience stops. Verse 10 continues....

“Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” You can hear the anger and frustration in Moses' voice. In the Greek Septuagint, the word translated rebels is moros-from where we get the word 'moron'.

God never commanded Moses to speak to the nation, -God told Moses to speak to the rock. And when Moses starts going down this road of disobedience, his actions become more and more flagrant against God.

So, after beginning to do what God had told him to do, he then did something God had not told him to do: He spoke to and lectured the nation.

This seems like a different Moses than the one we've studied the last several weeks, isn't it? Moses lectured the nation with an attitude of heart he hadn't shown before - one of anger and contempt for the people of God.

In Exodus 15, when the people contended with Moses because there was no water, Moses cried out to the LORD, not against the people.

When the people did need to be boldly confronted, Moses did it in Exodus 17; but without the anger, contempt, and bitterness we see here.

And we just saw in Numbers 16 how Moses fell on his face before God when the people rebelled.

But now-Moses boils over in anger.

There are plenty of explanations for Moses' frustration, but not a single excuse.

More shocking than this, Moses not only took the rebellion of the people against the LORD personally, he also over-magnified his own partnership with God-did you see it? Verse 10: **Must we bring water for you out of this rock?** Moses spoke as if he and God would do the job, like they divided the work fifty-fifty. Moses is implying that God couldn't bring water unless he was around.

Moses' heart has wandered from God.

11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. In Exodus 17 God told Moses to take his shepherd's staff and strike the rock. He did and water erupted. This time God tells Moses not to strike the rock, but to speak to the rock. Instead, Moses takes his rod and in his anger smacks it twice.

But notice what happens. Even though Moses disobeys, God refuses to allow an impulsive and ill-tempered servant to rob His people of a blessing.

God will deal with Moses in a moment, but for now He blesses His people.

And this is often the case. At times God blesses a church not because of the leader, but in spite of the leader.

12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." The root of Moses' sin in disobeying God was unbelief.

Now Moses didn't fail to believe that God could or would provide water for the people.

Rather, Moses failed to believe that simple obedience to God's command was best, so he took matters into his own hands. Taking matters into our own hands is always the result of unbelief.

But the unbelief was much more sinister than Moses ever imagined, because Moses misrepresented the heart and character of God before the people.

Moses comes out screaming at the Hebrews, venting 38 years of frustration on the nation.

That was not God's attitude at all. God loved these people. God was prepared to be as patient with the new generation as he had been with their parents.

Now we're given additional insight into this scene in

Psalm 106:32-33 "They angered Him also at the waters of strife,[fn]

So that it went ill with Moses on account of them;

33 Because they rebelled against His Spirit,

So that he spoke rashly with his lips."

Moses' responsibility was to speak on behalf of God to the people, not vent his own frustrations.

Without realizing it, Moses marred a beautiful picture God was painting for future generations – including us.

See Paul speaks of the rock in the wilderness, and says, "that Rock was Christ". 1 Corinthians 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

The rock was an OT picture of Jesus. See the rock was already struck one time back in Exodus 17. Jesus, being struck once, dying for all sins, He provides the living water for all who would drink of Him.

So it would be totally unnecessary that Jesus would need to be struck again, much less three times, because the Son of God needed only to die once.

Moses misrepresented God, and marred the picture of Jesus, and it cost him severely. And because of his disobedience Moses is prohibited from entering the Promised Land.

Let's read verse 12 again.

12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them

Moses will take the Hebrews to the border, but it'll be Joshua who'll lead them in.

Without question Moses was one of the greatest men in history. He had an incredible responsibility-leading 2m-3m people out of slavery on a journey towards the land that was their destiny. Moses spoke to God, and heard from the Lord. He was a uniquely blessed and godly man, but he was still a man.

We know that Moses wasn't perfect.

Now, if you were to study Moses' life and I asked you what was Moses' greatest sin, you'd likely point to his murdering of the Egyptian in Exodus 2.

Or you might point to his arguing with God that he couldn't lead the nation back in Exodus 4. But none of those things disqualified Moses in the way this sin does.

At first glance, this may appear to be an excessively harsh punishment for Moses. Despite all the times he interceded for the nation, it seems that with only one slip-up, he now had to die short of the Promised Land. We may protest and say it doesn't seem fair!

Yet Moses' punishment was a profound lesson for the Hebrews. Nobody was exempt from doing God's will, not even Moses.

Moses was being judged by a stricter standard because of his leadership position with the nation, and because he had a uniquely close relationship with God.

In fact we're told in **James 3:1 "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."**

God holds the leader and teacher to a higher standard.

Ask anyone in ministry, and they will tell you that at times ministry can be filled with frustration. Too often people aren't receptive, or don't live up to the truth they're given. Lots of Christians are apathetic and don't want to serve.

And when you put all this together, we can be tempted to lose our patience. We can blow our lid and come unglued, in the name of Jesus of course.

Here's the point-we can lose our composure – and get angry and resentful toward the same people God loves, and the people we've been called to serve.

We must be careful. Misrepresenting God is a serious offense.

My responsibility, and your responsibility, is not to express our opinions, although I know we've got lots of 'em! Our job is to represent God's eternal truth.

Now we know that Moses will not enter the promised land. But God is so merciful and gracious that 1,500 years later, who stands on the mount of transfiguration in the promised land? Moses himself in Matthew 17!

How merciful is our God?

13 This was the water of Meribah,[fn] because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them. The Hebrew word translated “Meribah” means “contention”. At the end of it all, God was seen as holy among the children of Israel. Moses failed; he didn’t hallow God here. But God hallowed Himself through the correction of Moses.

God will get His glory; God will be hallowed. The question is will it come through our obedience or our correction?

SHOW PIC 1

Now it’s important to know as bible students that this is the fifth stage of the Exodus from Egypt.

First, from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Exodus 12:31 to 18:27).

Second, the sojourn at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1 to Numbers 10:10).

Third, the first approach to the Promised Land, beginning at Mount Sinai, but being aborted at Kadesh with the refusal to enter the Promised Land in faith (Numbers 10:11 to 14:45).

Fourth, the 38 years of wandering in the wilderness until the generation of unbelief had died (Numbers 15:1 to Numbers 20:13).

Now, fifth, the second and final approach to the Promised Land (Numbers 20:14 to Joshua 2:24).

CLOSE PIC 1

14 Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, 15 how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob-we see this back in Genesis 25. Moses figured since they were relatives, Edom would offer safe passage.

16 When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. 17 Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.' " " All Moses asked for on behalf of Israel was the permission to pass through.

18 Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword." " He not only refuses Moses' request, but threatens a military reprisal.

19 So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more." They continue to try and reason with the Edom

20 Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. 21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him. Moses ended up circling south around the territory of Edom.

22 Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor.

23 And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: 24 “Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Folks, our rebellion against God never only just affects us. It affects those who are around us too.

25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; 26 and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there.”

27 So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28 Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. 29 Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

The death of Aaron was a monumental loss for the nation. He was the first high priest.

Now here’s how we know that Aarons death came in the 38th year, the 40th year total since they left Egypt. **Numbers 33:38** **Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month**. So 40 years, minus the year plus they spent at the base of Sinai = 38 years of wandering.

Numbers 20 is a heartbreaking look at the frailty of 3 people whom God used mightily, yet each of them had disastrous moments where they misrepresented God.

Miriam is now dead-Aaron is now dead. Both of them wouldn’t see the promised land.

And neither will Moses.

We see a tragic postscript regarding this scene from Moses in Deuteronomy 3:23 “Then I pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying: 24 ‘O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds? 25 I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.’

26 “But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the LORD said to me: ‘Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. 27 Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. 28 But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.’

Even though Moses’ anger marred God’s symbolism, even in his disobedience another picture was established. Moses represents the Law, and in the end the Law could not take the people into the Promised Land. That job was left to a man named Yeshua, or Joshua. And you know that Jesus and Joshua are the same name.

Numbers 20 should be engraved in the thoughts of every Christian, because you and I are constantly faced with the same danger that Moses succumbed to: That of a wandering heart.

Now I highly doubt if we wander we’ll ever do it in such a public, notable way that Moses did, or even Robert Robertson did.

But we are foolish to think that our adversary is not plotting landmines for us to step on, so that we bring shame upon God’s name.

How do we guard our hearts from wandering? Praise God He doesn't just tell us what to do, God tells us HOW to do it, through His Word.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. The more earnest heed means to pay attention more abundantly and more frequently. We're to be immersed into the things we've heard of God's word. Why? So we don't drift away.

Moses didn't suddenly decide to misrepresent God. His heart had begun to wander from God long before this moment.

And as a result, Moses harshly rebuked the people (v. 10), took credit for what God had done (v. 10), resented the Israelites (v. 10), lost his temper (v. 11), disobeyed God (v. 11), didn't trust God's power (v. 12), failed to glorify God (v. 12), and rebelled against God (v. 24)

His frustrations started out small in heart. And in time they were watered and nurtured and they grew until this fateful moment.

No tree suddenly falls-there's always a weaking in the roots, below the surface, where no one can see.

No marriage suddenly collapses-there's an emotional drifting away that takes place first.

No church suddenly splits-there's always an undertow of discontent first.

No Christian suddenly wanders from God-there's always a pattern of compromise first.