

GRACE BUILDS HUMILITY Numbers 12:1-15

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever been intimidated by anyone? Sometimes it is not their fault...we are just intimidated because we are awed by their power or position. But others intimidate us intentionally in order to gain an advantage over us...to bully us and take away our dignity...to **humiliate us**.

But then there is another kind of person who is as powerful or more but we are not intimidated by them, nor humiliated by them. The reason is that they desire to give us value, not demean or take away dignity from us. They could crush us but choose instead to be gracious to us...to build us up...and the effect is that they **humble us**.

- Bullies intimidate and humiliate us.
- Grace givers build up and humble us.

Grace builds humility into our lives because we know we could easily be dominated by them, but they have chosen to treat us with respect and dignity, to value us when they could just as easily humiliate and embarrass us.

God teaches us lessons about humility all the time in His Word. Today we want to learn one of those lessons from the life of His servant Moses.

THESIS: Grace builds humility when we realize that we owe everything to the Giver of every good thing!

I. GOD'S GRACE

--God was never obligated to initiate a relationship with fallen, sinful people, but by His grace, He took the actions necessary to call out a people for Himself—a holy, forgiven, godly people to glorify Him and make His glory known.

--God chose to establish a people, through no merit of their own, but through a covenant promise with Abraham that He has kept to this day.

A. COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Gen. 12:1-3 *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

--Abraham was a man living in a culture filled with idolatry, surrounded by ungodliness and with nothing to commend him as the target of God's affection.

--But God called him and placed His hand upon his life so that **by His grace**, Abraham became the father of nations who would know and love the Lord God.

B. PRESERVATION OF ISRAEL

--After seeing their godless ways and persistent stubbornness, after countless measures to call them to godly living and to embrace their eternal heritage by faith—God prepared a way for Israel to survive and flourish, to grow strong numerically and become a people of substance on the world scene.

--The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob provided a way for Israel to survive by an act of providence—sending Joseph (son of Jacob) as a slave to Egypt where he rose to such prominence that he became Pharaoh's manager for the nation.

--For over four hundred years, Israel lived as a nation under the power of Egypt but grew to be a force to be reckoned with.

Ex. 1:7 *But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.*

--Not that Israel would have chosen this means of preservation, but God knew best how to keep them together and grow them up by isolating them from the surrounding nations, protecting them from foreign threats and preserving their covenant identity as they survived among an alien people.

--By grace, God grew them **by His grace**, but kept them humble by their circumstances.

C. SENDING OF DELIVERER

--But as we now encounter Moses, we find that the Lord has now completed this phase of their preservation and preparation and sends them someone to deliver them from their bondage.

--They had done nothing to deserve this liberation and no case could be made for their being worthy of it, but **by His grace** God sent them a deliverer, a liberator in the person of Moses.

--So God chose Israel by grace, preserved them by grace and delivered them by grace—quite a humbling realization to see that they could claim nothing for themselves but owed their very lives to the God of grace.

--Grace builds humility when we realize that we owe everything to the Giver of every good thing!

◆ Does God's grace build humility into your life?

--Because of His grace...

- *Remember the cross and be humbled that Jesus Christ died there for you.*
- *Reflect at the end of the day on the goodness of God and be humbled by all He did for and kept from you.*
- *Return thanks and give glory to the Lord and be humbled that you were once dead in sin but now have been made alive in Christ!*

II. ISRAEL'S REBELLION

--Knowing that all things that had come their way to give them life and an identity as the chosen people of God, would you not think that Israel would be a grateful, humble people?

--One would think!! But instead of gratitude and humility, we find them to be so much like us—filled with rebellious hearts and defiant spirits, demanding to rule their own lives and claim their every success for themselves.

--Moses found them to be a most difficult and rebellious people to lead because they did not allow the knowledge of their God to shape the character of their lives.

--Consider what he ran into again and again in his dealings with those called and chosen to be the people of God.

A. UNBELIEF

--A key to understanding the problems with Israel begins with the simple truth that they refused to believe God—no matter what He promised and what miraculous things He did, they still acted as if they despised Him, scorned Him and treated Him with contempt.

Numbers 14:11 *The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? [NIV]*

--All the other sins they committed against Him originated in unbelief, just as it does in our lives still.

Hebrews 3:12, 19 *Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God...¹⁹ And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.*

--As sinful as they could be—and as sinful as we still can be—God is looking for a believing heart that will trust Him to keep His word.

--The Israelites were unwilling to believe...not because they had no credible evidence...not because they doubted His ability...but because their hearts were so obstinate and stubborn that they refused to believe.

B. ENVIOUS AND DEFIANT SPIRITS

--God called Moses to lead Israel...to speak to him personally on behalf of the people...to show him where to take them, how to shepherd them, even how to judge them.

--The rebellious nature of the people was such that they could not put up with God's choice and determined to assert their right to do what they wanted, to do what seemed best to them.

--They were jealous of his calling, resistant to his leadership, and committed to his replacement.

1. Moses' Family

Num. 12:1-2 *Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); 2 and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" And the LORD heard it.*

--Envy produced defiance even as Miriam and Aaron tried to convince themselves that Moses was the one with the problem (suggesting that his marriage was to blame for their actions).

2. Israel's Leaders

Num. 16:2-3 *and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. ³ And they assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"*

C. GRUMBLING ATTITUDES

--Unbelieving hearts became grumbling hearts because they never factored into their circumstances that God was present with them.

--The pride of their unbelief blinded them to the realities of what His presence could mean if they simply chose to trust Him and believe in His promises and power.

1. About Hardship

Numbers 11:1 *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.*

--Although they had only recently seen the power of God's hand in amazing miracles, the people grumbled and complained as evidence of their unbelief.

a. About Water

Exodus 15:22, 24 *Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water...²⁴ So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"*

b. About Food

Exodus 16:2-3 *And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ And the sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."*

2. About Fairness

--Even Moses fell into the trap of being a complainer after having to listen to all the moaning and groaning of the people.

Numbers 11:14-15 *I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now — if I have found favor in your eyes — and do not let me face my own ruin."*

3. About Consequences of Defiance

--The people even grumbled against Moses and Aaron when the consequences they witnessed were the direct result of the rebellious actions of their leaders.

--Instead of being thankful for the intercession of Moses which held back God's further judgment, they grumbled as if Moses were the cause of the problem.

Num. 16:41 *But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD's people."*

--But through all of these rebellious attitudes and actions, Moses grew as a man of God and developed a humility and meekness that only the Lord could produce.

--He saw God's grace at work and in spite of the unwillingness of Israel to acknowledge that grace, he maintained a humble heart and a compassionate spirit toward the very ones who despised his leadership.

III. MOSES' HUMILITY

Numbers 12:3 *(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)*

--Right on the heels of a brazen challenge to his leadership, we find this description of Moses..."very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."

--Three factors converged to make this true of Moses:

- *Face to face encounters with God Almighty*
- *Failures and faithless actions in his own life*
- *Flagrant hardness of heart and stubborn unbelief of Israel*

--All of these worked together to humble him, to put things in proper perspective and remind him of how gracious the Lord had been to even include him in His eternal plans.

A. SERVED WITH SELFLESSNESS

--Two primary concerns influenced what Moses did in providing leadership for Israel

1. The Integrity and Honor of the Name of the LORD

--Foremost in Moses' mind after he had seen what it meant to rely on the faithfulness of God was to see His name held in the highest regard both for Israel and the surrounding nations.

Numbers 14:15-16 *"Now if Thou dost slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Thy fame will say, ¹⁶ 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.'*

2. The Protection and Well-being of the People of Israel

--But he also was concerned for the people themselves, that even though they deserved the wrath of God, he prayed for God to forgive them.

Numbers 14:19 “Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Thy lovingkindness, just as Thou also hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

B. CRIED OUT FOR MERCY

--On many, many occasions, Moses showed his compassionate heart in the way he cried out for mercy, falling on his face before God on behalf of guilty people so that they might experience grace instead of judgment.

- Fires of judgment—***Numbers 11:1-2***
- Miriam’s leprosy—***Numbers 12:13***
- Israel’s rebellion—***Numbers 14:19***

Exception: Korah’s rebellion was more than a power struggle but an open defiance of God’s revealed plan for worship...Moses prays in this case for the Lord to have no regard for their worship and to bring His wrath against them—still protecting the nation (***Numbers 16:22***) but judging the advocates of ungodly means of worship (***Numbers 16:29-30***).

--So Moses, in his humility, did not abandon the people in their stubborn unbelief and defiance, but chose to plead with the Lord on their behalf.

C. REFUSED TO DEFEND HIMSELF

--But perhaps the greatest indication of Moses’ humility shows up in the way he responded when his character and his leadership was assaulted.

--He did not defend himself or try to make his own case, but stepped back and allowed the Lord to vindicate him.

--Two examples for our consideration:

- Miriam’s questioning of his claim to leadership did not provoke him to retaliate against her but humility led him to intercede for her.

*“I am as qualified as Moses...does God only speak to and through him?” – ***12:2****

- People believed the spies’ reports instead of God’s promise and demanded the right to choose their own leader to replace Moses

*“Let’s appoint our own leader and go back to Egypt...where we belong, not out here where we are stuck with no one to lead us but God’s pitiful choice, Moses!” – ***14:4****

CONCLUSION: Moses grew in humility as he learned more about the grace of God. As a matter of fact, the more we discover of God’s grace at work in us, the more humble we will be as well.

But the great model Moses gives of this sweet, humble spirit, pales in comparison with the humility of Jesus Christ. In other words, Moses was great...but Jesus is better!

Jesus’ humility is pure and perfect...a model for the attitude each of us is to demonstrate when Jesus guards our hearts and minds, rules over our attitudes and actions.

Philippians 2:5-8 *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied Himself, taking the*

form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

You cannot do this on your own. The gospel has been declared to you so that by believing in Jesus, all your vain efforts to improve can be forgotten as you find new life through the grace of Christ. From the inside out He will transform you to become like He is.

- *Jesus refused to defend Himself but let the Father vindicate His name*
- *Jesus called out for mercy for sinners who defied His name*
- *Jesus served selflessly the very ones who selfishly rejected His name*

By the grace of Christ, you can become like Moses in his humility—only better, because it will no longer be you attempting to be humble but it will be Christ in His humility living His life through you!

◆ ***Does God's grace build humility into your life?***

--Because of His grace...

- *Remember the cross and be humbled that Jesus Christ died there for you.*
- *Reflect at the end of the day on the goodness of God and be humbled by all He did for and kept from you.*
- *Return thanks and give glory to the Lord and be humbled that you were once dead in sin but now have been made alive in Christ!*

God chooses to resist the proud but exalt the humble. When you see the riches of His grace toward you in Christ, give Him praise that we can have the humility of Christ...and give all glory to the God of grace who gives every good gift to us that the name of Christ may be lifted up through our humble service to such a majestic and gracious King.

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