

What makes him so special?

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[0 : 00] God has a wonderful sense of humour and great ways of humbling his servants. So here I am preaching about humility. Let me tell you how the morning began.

Needed to print out my sermon, needed to redo the service sheet and the photocopier machine that we have, which is a magic machine, had a major meltdown.

And I come back in to pick up my work off the machine and two people are standing there, two of you are standing there. I've apologised to one already, I'll get to the other one, saying it's all jammed up and it's just not working.

And I said, somebody's physically turned the switch off on the site because the switch was off on the site. And they're standing there going, wasn't me, wasn't me. And I'm thinking, well, somebody's turned it off.

So we go through the cycle again, we turn it on, we push the instruction on the top, and as soon as we push the instruction on the top, the switch on the side of the machine goes, click.

[1 : 06] I was wrong. It's hard to say, isn't it? Let's pray. Lord, as we come to your word this morning, we pray that you would speak to us by your spirit.

We pray that you would be at work in all of us, transforming us into the likeness of Christ and wrestling with who we really are and submitting to you as who you really are.

And we pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. To recap, we are on a journey. We had an intermission last week. We had back to church Sunday and we've got one or two back with us this morning and that's fantastic.

But we're on a journey. Before that, we've been on this journey in the Old Testament, through the Old Testament book of Numbers. And we began the series in Numbers chapter 9 and God leading his people on a journey to the land of promise.

All was well. God was in their midst. The whole nation's life was centred on him. There was joy and purpose for living which came from having God as the absolute centre of this nation.

[2 : 18] And so it was a journey that began a bit like a Ferrari ride if you've been on the upgraded M2, the beautiful, smooth surface that it's got at the moment. It's fast. It's smooth. It's powerful.

There's not a bump in the road. And then you get to Numbers chapter 11 where we were last time and it is as if the Ferrari has turned off the highway onto a rocky bush track and the grumbles begin.

The people complain about their difficult life. They quickly forget how hard it was before. They complain about the menu. They like economy class passengers on a flight to the United States.

They're grizzling about the legroom, the service and the food. And Moses comes out one morning and people are just sobbing all over the place.

It says in Numbers 11, they're standing, the whole families are standing at the entrances of their tents, just sobbing. And Moses is so overwhelmed by the people's demands, he melts down and he makes this pitiful complaint to God, finishing with, if this is how you are going to treat me, do me a favour and put me to death right now.

[3 : 39] Don't try it. They are not in a good place. Short story is God judges the people.

But the amazing thing is that God answers Moses with a word which is to awaken faith. Is the Lord's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.

And we read on and you see that God does the impossible. He feeds the people. He judges them.

But he tenderly provides for Moses. And he raises up 70 spirit-filled leaders to assist him in the task of leading the nation.

So God hears his complaint and provides for him in a very generous and personal way. And that leads us into Numbers chapter 12 where we are today.

So for Moses, leadership clearly isn't easy. The complaints continue but now they come from a different direction. This time they come from his right-hand man and his right-hand woman, both on the same side.

[4 : 48] Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife for he had married a Cushite. Has the Lord only spoken through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?

And the Lord heard this. So Miriam and Aaron are Moses' older brother and sister. They've both had very significant and prophetic roles in leading the people of Israel.

Aaron was the high priest for the nation. He was also Moses' public address system. So when Moses spoke to the people, it was Aaron who did the talking. Miriam was probably the protective big sister who watched over her baby brother when their mum floated him in the Nile River.

She was the woman in Exodus 15 who led the women of Israel singing and praising God when he saved them from the Egyptian army.

Now she joyously grabbed the tambourine. She bounced all over the place. They danced and sang. She said, Sing to the Lord for he's highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. And so Moses and Aaron and Miriam were the leading people of the nation until the Lord appointed 70 spirit-filled leaders to assist Moses.

[6 : 16] The leadership team's just been expanded in a really big way and not everyone's happy. Sort of like a family owned and run business merging with a corporation with a whole lot of people who are at a similar level of leadership.

And there are many relationships to be juggled as people find their place in this new organisation. Job security, potential loss of significance are big drivers for many of us.

And so what happens? Well, two of the original three gang up on little brother. So verse 1, Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife.

For he'd married a Cushite. Has the Lord only spoken through him? And Moses gets what you call triangled. It's the sort of thing that people do all the time.

Your kids are having a fight. Two of your kids are having a fight. Well, your grandkids, they're having a fight and you step in and think you'll try and fix things. And all of a sudden, what do they do?

[7 : 31] They unite, they form an alliance against you and you get sucked into the conflict and they're firmly placed on the other side. See, Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses and the basis for their accusation is his foreign wife.

Exodus tells us her name is Zephora. She's a Moabites who might have come from a place called Cushan. She may have had a different skin colour.

She's descended from Abraham. But not from Israel. She hadn't been through the plagues in Egypt or the journey through the bottom of the sea. She had remained with her dad while Moses went and confronted the king of Egypt.

So we're not really sure what their problem with her was. You know, were they critical of her race? Or that she hadn't been through the salvation and the hard times that they had been through?

Or that she had Moses' ear in a way that they don't? But whatever it is, it becomes the issue that Miriam and Aaron work themselves up into a lather over to the point that they assert themselves against Moses.

[8 : 48] has the Lord only spoken through him? And it's almost like, well, what makes him so special? Very Aussie. They cut down the tall poppy and they effectively say, he's no better than us.

We've prophesied. And they are right because the Lord has spoken through both of them. But they are wrong because God has made Moses special and God has called Moses to his role.

It's not a very easy thing to be a leader when other people think they can do a better job than you.

I've been there. And it's easy to think that you are the better preacher or that you have the intellectual high ground or that you have a much better idea of what is strategic and what our leaders should be doing.

Most of us have spent the last few weeks being the wise ones and articulating what our prime minister and government should be concerned about. We know how to do that job, don't we?

And it's very easy when we challenge leadership to be in the same time what we're actually doing is we're exalting ourselves. And so Miriam and Aaron lift themselves to Moses' level.

[10 : 17] They don't try to go over his level, they just try to come up to his level. And they say, has the Lord only spoken through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us? But they're not innocent

questions because the challenge is on.

And there is a very foreboding and the Lord heard this. Verse 2. And God steps in and he stands by his man.

So verse 4, at once the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you, get out here. So the three of them came out and then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and he stood at the entrance to the tent and he summoned Aaron and Miriam.

And when both of them stepped forward, he said, listen to my words. When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions.

I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house.

With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles.

[11:25] He sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And verse 9, the anger of the Lord burned against them and he left them.

They get a divine dressing down. My tent now, all of you. He presents himself in power.

The pillar of cloud descends. He calls Aaron and Miriam and says, step forward. They are prophets and so are the 70 helpers.

They declare the work and the words, the work and the, the word and the works of God. If my spirit, if my sermon is spirit empowered this morning, it is a prophetic word in as much as it is a forth telling of the word of God in a way that engages our hearts and is driven by the spirit of God.

And I always pray that God would speak through his proclaimed word, whether it's a word we speak in public or a word that we speak in private. And so any power is not mine, it's God's power.

[12:54] So the Lord doesn't mince words telling Miriam and Moses that when he is among them in prophecy, it is him communicating his words in dreams and visions. It's not them and their abilities, it's his power which is driving them.

And then he says, but Moses is different. He is my personal house servant. He is faithful to me. I speak with Moses man to man and face to face and he sees my form.

I've got relationship with him that I haven't got with you in the same way. Moses doesn't have to make a name for himself.

God gives him a wonderful rap. It's the Old Testament equivalent of a New Testament well done good and faithful servant. And so the question is, and it's God's question, why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

And this is not a question, this is an accusation from God. And we're told in verse 9, the anger of the Lord burned against them and he left them.

[14:17] And he didn't just make an accusation, he left Miriam with leprosy like snow and probably with something like a white flaky skin disease all over her body, which would have been enough to immediately make her unclean and unable to come amongst the people of God.

But it was probably a threat to her life because Aaron just immediately pleads with Moses, please my Lord, do not hold this, hold against us the sin that we have so foolishly committed.

Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb and with its flesh half eaten away. It's quite a wonderful prayer.

There's no ifs and buts. There's no excuses. There's no blame shifting. There's corporate ownership.

We, not she. This is a sin which we have foolishly committed. Please don't let her rot away.

[15:32] Amen. Amen. Amen. It's liberating to confess our sins in God's presence.

To not have to hide from what we are really like. To be set free from games of pretense. Have you ever done it?

I have. And it is absolutely freeing. And I don't just mean private confession to God we're on our knees at home telling him what we've done. But I mean going to the person that you have offended against.

And owning your own offence against them. I am sorry I did gossip about you when I said that. We read it all the time from 1 John chapter 1 don't we?

If we confess our sins. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Aaron owns his sins straight away.

[16:55] It's not cheap forgiveness. They do come clean. They beg for mercy from Moses. And Moses with great grace and probably great love for his sister cries to the Lord Oh God Oh God please help her.

That could have been a moment of power for him couldn't it? What can I milk out of this moment? Oh God please help her.

Failure in confession is a very humbling thing. It's good for our souls. It's good for our relationships with each other. It's good for our relationship with God.

And God responds to Moses' intercession. It seems like Miriam probably was healed straight away. It's not specific. And then she was left outside the camp for seven days while the whole nation waited on her.

A million people waited for her to go past her period of cleansing. She had done a disgraceful thing but she was completely forgiven.

[18:07] And you get this picture that God the way that God treats her is a picture that says sin matters but it's also a picture that says that the grace of God is very large indeed.

there's something else in this event that is worth noting. If you read through that passage you will see that Moses does not speak a word except to say oh God please help her.

He says nothing to defend himself. He speaks no word of rebuke to Miriam and Aaron. Verse 3 tells us something which is enormously significant Moses was a very humble man more humble than anybody who had ever lived.

You think well what does that mean? What does that look like? Because Moses was a man who had been used by God in many extraordinary moments.

He had stared down the king of Egypt while God inflicted his plagues. he had raised his staff over the waters of the Red Sea and the sea had parted when God parted the waters and more than a million people passed through on dry ground.

[19:34] He had had the experience of relating to God man to man face to face. He had had unique experiences of God and his power.

He had had the adrenaline rush of seeing God do extraordinary things and yet it says he was a humble man more humble than anybody who had ever lived.

The Hebrew word which is translated humility is used in other parts of the Old Testament to mean things like poor. And needy and socially weak and afflicted and humiliated.

And you can look at Moses from another direction and say well Moses is afflicted and he's humiliated by his own people. He is burdened and he is bowed down. And in his great moments of power and in his personal moments of affliction he is a man whose personal ego is submitted to God's will.

Whether it's a high high or a low low. So he can walk in glory, he can walk in humiliation and he is humble.

[21:01] He lives in close personal relationship with God but with his ego in submission to the Lord. humility. I think humility is what lies behind the apostle Paul saying in Philippians 4 12, I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. I think this is a lesson for me, I'm still growing in my understanding of this but when we think humility we as Aussies I think often think of somebody who doesn't have tickets on themselves or who is self-effacing, a person who deflects attention away from themselves so you've done something that people acknowledge and say it's really great, oh no, no, no, it was nothing, it wasn't me.

But it's not humility if we crawl away into a hole really wanting the glory on ourselves. A humble person gives glory where glory is due. So for a humble person God's glory comes before our own ego.

If Christ has gifted you, maybe in work which you do or ministry, work that you do in your workplace or work that you do in ministry, ministry, and if he has called you to humble service in those things, then give him the glory by using those gifts in his service and to his glory.

Do them well in his name. And maybe Christ has put you in a lowly place, a hard place, a place of suffering, a place maybe where your work is not seen or acknowledged by anybody at all.

[22:54] home. I still think of a young woman working in the kitchen at a youth camp. Everybody wants to do the big high profile tasks, you know, counsellor to the kids or speaker at the youth events and all those sorts of things.

And this woman worked in the kitchen in a way that wasn't just a job to do, it was the ministry that she was doing in serving everybody at the camp.

No personal acknowledgement by most, but one or two did see. And it says heaps. She was humble. She served Christ.

She gave him the glory in what she was doing. See, Miriam and Aaron let their pride run away from them. Now, they were anything other than humble.

they made a grasp for recognition and exalted themselves when God was clearly raising up other leaders around them. And they exalted themselves over God's appointed leader, Moses.

[24 : 04] Philippians chapter two says in verses three and four, do nothing, it says to us, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. And I think one of the things that Philippians is showing us is that humility's opposite is our own selfish ambition and vain conceit, glory taken for ourselves.

So life becomes about me and my issues and I am always the first one in line for the things I need help with. Aaron and Miriam made a grasp for their own position and place, two ganged up on three.

Moses was different. He put the interests of the nation ahead of his own numbers of times. God even offered at one point to wipe everybody else out and make him the head of a dynasty, start again with a brand new family and he would be king pin, top dog.

God and Moses said no because he was concerned for God's name and God's glory if God did such a thing. So humility is not selfish.

[25 : 25] Humble men and women have their egos submitted to Christ and to his purposes. When Numbers was written, Moses was indeed the most humble man who had ever lived.

But Philippians goes on to use Christ, not Moses, as the ultimate humble man. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Christ is the ultimate example of humility. Christ Jesus, God himself, did not assert himself or his rights.

He did not make a shortcut grasp for power. God said, he could have called a legion of angels to save himself from the cross. He submitted himself, he yielded his ego in faith and trust to the will and purposes of his heavenly father.

My father, take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours be done. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Christ knew who he was.

[27 : 05] He knew who his father was. He knew what the mission was. He did not accidentally die. He became obedient to death, even the humiliation of death on a cross at the hands of the people that he had made.

Christ submitted his own ego to glorious purpose that his father would achieve. And that is why in Philippians 2 it says that God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

God stood by his man and he vindicated him. God stood by his man Moses and he vindicated him.

We can be absolutely confident that if we will humble ourselves and submit our egos to the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, then he will vindicate us.

A life lived for him will never be wasted. 1 Peter chapter 5 says all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

[28 : 41] Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

God intervenes to protect his people. Humble authenticity is rightly one of the seven core values of St. Paul's. Let me finish by reminding you what it says.

As a church we seek to declare war on the daily tendency towards self-sufficiency and the desire to live independently of God. The promise of God in James 4 6 is that he gives grace to the humble.

We are convinced that no effective growth, ministry or mission happens without the cultivation of humility in the heart and the weakening of pride in this life.

And we therefore seek our words and actions to be what we believe and teach from God's word. brothers and sisters you do not need to be a great one to be humble.

[29 : 54] It is a wonderful thing to submit our egos to Christ and to walk in submission to him.
Amen.