

The Death of Aaron

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to Numbers chapter 20. Numbers chapter 20. It's on page 154.

At least that's the page number I have. It's Numbers chapter 20 and verse 22. Numbers 20 and verse 22.

And they journeyed from Kaddish and the people of Israel, the whole congregation came to Mount Hor. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor on the border of the land of Edom, Let Aaron be gathered to his people.

For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the people of Israel, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son and bring them up to Mount Hor.

And strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son. And Aaron shall be gathered to his people and shall die there. Moses did as the Lord commanded.

[1 : 05] And they went up Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. And 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. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron had perished, all the house of Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days.

I want to return this evening to this chapter. You remember those of you who were with us last week.

That we try to understand what happened when Moses struck the rock at Meribah.

And why it was that as a result of his striking the rock, instead of speaking to it as God had commanded, that God had judged that Moses had sinned.

[2 : 05] And as a consequence of that sin, he was no longer permitted to enter into the promised land. But you remember also that this takes place within a context of several different sad events that took place at that particular time.

Within a very short space of time, the chapter opens with the death of Miriam, Moses' sister. And then, of course, there's the incident at the rock, where the people grumble against Moses for not providing them with water.

And they say the most awful things, the most untrue things about God and about Moses. You remember how it was a consequence of that, that God had told Moses to speak to the rock.

But instead of doing that, it appears that his emotions got the better of him and that his rationality had left him. And he said things to the people that God had never commanded him to say.

And instead of speaking to the rock, he spoke to the people and he smote the rock. And even though water came out, God was not glorified. But the chapter moves on.

[3 : 14] And from one sad event, it leads to another. Because in verse 14, you read that as the children of Israel went on, they needed to go through the country of Edom.

And the Edomites, who were relatives of Israel, going all the way back through the generations to Isaac and Esau, they refused to allow them, refused to give them passage.

And what's strange, and what I'm sure was perplexing about this incident for Moses, was that God, it appears that God had nothing to say to them.

And even although that was the case, Moses pressed on. Because like I said last time, there are times when it appears as if God is silent, and God is invisible.

That's where it takes faith to come back to God's word, and where that faith demands that we trust in God, because of what he has done for us in Jesus Christ.

[4 : 27] He who withheld not his own son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not also freely with him give us all things? These are the times when we have to remember what God has done in the past, and that God is always faithful.

But the chapter moves on from one sad event to another, from one perplexing event to another, because at the end of the chapter, it comes time for Moses to die.

And his death came, we're told, as a consequence of his collaboration with Moses. Moses, and at the rock, Aaron was Moses' brother, and had been with him for his whole life, and had been a support.

That didn't mean that they always got on well together, like many families. There were times when they fell out, and times when there was conflict. And yet, it's true to say that Aaron had supported, and Miriam, his sister, had supported Moses in what he had done for the Lord.

And there is no suggestion that just because Aaron had to die as a consequence of what happened at Meribah, that somehow that he wasn't one of the Lord's people.

[5 : 43] He most certainly was. And I want to prove that. I hope I can prove that to you in a few moments' time. I want us to think of three things about this description between verse 22 and verse 29 of how Aaron died.

Because it's not just that he died, it's the whole process leading up to his death, and the death itself. Perhaps you might think that this is a very morbid subject to take on a Sunday evening.

It's God's Word. God's Word is always realistic. And God's Word tells it as it is. And God confronts us in his Word with the reason why all of us one day will die.

Because we live in a fallen world, a condemned world, a world in which the wages of sin is death. And that's the reason why Jesus came into the world, to rescue us from that death and to transform death into life, into the gateway to heaven.

The Bible never tries to shy away from the reality of death. God, that's what we do. We try and hide it. We try and sanitize it.

[6 : 56] We try and think of the bright side. We try and say things like every cloud has a silver lining. We try and sing songs like you always got to think of the bright side of life.

That's not the way the Bible deals with realities of life and death at all. But it tells us the wages of sin is death. But, but the gift of God is everlasting life.

That's the message I want to hear tonight. That's the message I need to hear as a human being, as a broken, lost human being. I need to know is there anyone out there who has taken death away and has resolved it and has removed it?

And the answer is yes. The Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus, the Son of God, in rising from the dead himself has conquered death. And so tonight we can read a passage like this without being morbid and knowing with confidence that even although Aaron's time had come, that God had prepared for Aaron a place in heaven with himself.

So for Aaron, this was the moment of glory. None of us, and I'm quite sure that Aaron wouldn't have chosen this moment. None of us would. and yet God has chosen and appointed that moment for every one of us.

[8 : 16] But if we're in Jesus, if we belong to Jesus by faith, having accepted him, then for us that moment is the moment at which we go forever to be with the Lord.

God says, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. And so instead of instead of reading this with morbidity, we read this with confidence and we want to speak about it with confidence and we want to extract as much helpful information as we possibly can for our good and for our encouragement and so that God can remind us through his word of what lies ahead of every one of us.

I want us to think about this in three ways then. I want us to think first of all of what Aaron's death meant to Moses. Secondly, I want us to think of what Aaron's death meant to Aaron.

And then thirdly, I want us to think of what Aaron's death meant to the people of Israel because this was a public, most extraordinary because this is not a private death.

This is a public death and it was so deliberately. It was quite a unique occasion. But I want us to know, I want us to think about what his death meant to the people.

[9 : 44] What must, what effect this may have had on them and how God spoke to them and the message even in death of life, the life that God was preparing for them and giving them all the time.

So there's three things then. First of all, I would like us to think about what his death meant to Moses, his brother. I wonder what they spoke about when they walked up that mountain for the very first time.

I'm not sure how long it took them to make their way up the mountain. I'm not sure how steep it was. Moses was an incredibly fit man at his age.

He was now over a hundred years old and yet he seems to have been able to climb mountains as if he was going down to the shop. There was no problem to him whatsoever. And it seemed to have been the same with Aaron.

I wonder what they spoke about on this last journey. Many is a journey they had made together. They had travelled many a long mile and talked about many things. But now they knew that their time was limited.

[10 : 55] And when your time is limited with someone, I guess you make sure that what you talk about is important. But then, is that not the way things should be in any case?

Should we not live like that? taking account of the fact that our life is limited in this world. We're not going to live here forever.

We don't know how long we've got in this world. Even if you're young, you still don't know how long you have in this world. And yet we all live, I suppose I'm as guilty as anyone else, of just assuming that my life's going to last forever.

It's not. That's why it's important to come to the Bible. Because the Bible is one of the only places that tells me that reminds me time and time again of the certainty of how limited my life is and how short my days here in this world are.

But it's not just for ourselves that we have to make the most of it. It's for other people because we're in this world with other people. Moses and Aaron were brothers.

[12 : 05] And I would hazard a guess, I can't say this with any authority because it's not there, but I would hazard a guess that they conversed with one another. And that they made the most of, I wonder if this was the moment at which Moses made right anything, any conflict that there was between himself and his brother.

We live in a broken world, a world in which relationships break down from time to time. And the problem is that sometimes that we don't make them up again. people can separate and remain separate, people who were in the same family or who were once friends.

And one of the reasons for that is because we don't take account of how short our lives are here in this world. I find passages like this really challenging because they remind me of how important it is to, if possible, put right anything that has gone wrong between me and someone else.

Whether that person is in my family or whether that person was a friend or whoever it is. And if I'm a Christian tonight, then it's, there is a special command, a special directive from the Lord to not only forgive anyone who has done something against me, it is imperative for me to forgive that person.

or at the very least to make sure that I am ready and willing and that I make every effort in myself, that I make every effort to put right anything that has gone wrong.

[13:50] That's why the Lord said, he said, if you're going to the altar with your gift and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go and be reconciled to your brother, at least to make the effort to be reconciled, maybe if your brother refuses to be reconciled to you, that's his problem.

But it's imperative on the Lord's people to be peacemakers, to be peacemakers. And that means not only to put right what's gone wrong, if we can, graciously and humbly and in a Christ-like manner, denying ourselves and our own pride, how often it is that it's our own pride that has got in the way and that prevents us from being reconciled.

Now I'm not, I am not thinking of, I can guarantee you tonight, there is nobody in front of my mind's eye right now. It applies to all of us, every single one of us.

Life is short, our days are numbered. Lord, make the most of every day while you have it here in this world.

I wonder also if Moses was angry with the Lord, if he was tempted to be angry with the Lord for what had happened because he knew that it was as a result.

[15:17] I wonder if he was tempted to say to the Lord, Lord, I don't understand this and I don't think we deserve this. My brother who has been with me my whole life here he is, you're going to take his life away.

Look at all that we've done for you. Look at all that we've sacrificed for you, literally and figuratively. All the years that we have given and now because of this one misdemeanor, one occasion in which we went astray, you're bringing all this upon Aaron and eventually me as well because you've said that I can't enter into the promised land.

I wonder if Moses felt guilty because he was at least partly responsible for what was now happening to Aaron. I wonder if he was confused, I wonder if he felt, if he was looking ahead to the moment when now Miriam was gone, now Aaron was just about to be taken away, he was going to be left alone with all of these people to lead them and to guide them.

and yet, as always with Moses, there was nobody like him in the whole of the Old Testament, there was nobody like Moses.

In fact, the Bible itself tells us that, that there was nobody like Moses who knew God face to face and Moses appears in his demeanor and his conduct to reconcile, to be reconciled to whatever the Lord had for him, whether he understood it or not, or whether it was easy for him, whether it was pleasant for him or not.

[16:59] Moses knew how to put his own personal happiness to one side for the sake of the glory of God, and I believe that that's because he knew something, he had seen something of the glory of the Lord up Mount Sinai, and he knew that that was what counted more than anything else.

when you know the Lord yourself, life for the people, life for the Lord's people can very often be hugely painful and perplexing, and just because you're a Christian doesn't mean that somehow God takes the pain away and makes you immune to suffering.

He doesn't. The Lord's people do suffer in various ways in this world, and it's important that they do because it's through suffering that we can witness in a very unique and in a very special way in which we can be drawn close to the Lord.

The hymn writer said this, whatever my God ordains is right, holy his will abideth. I will be still whatever he doth and follow where he guideth.

He is my God, though dark my road, he leads me that I cannot fall. Therefore to him I yield it all.

[18:35] And that was the life of Moses. That's the example that we have. What a man of God. Even although God was rebuking him and judging him, he took it all.

Whatever my God ordains is right. what did it mean to Aaron then as he made his way up with Moses, his brother, knowing that he was going to die.

Well, that's the first thing. We don't even need to go past that. He knew that that was the very reason he was making the journey and that at the top of the mountain he was going to reach the last day of his life and he would never make the journey back down again.

And that journey I suppose was I guess it's symbolic of the journey that we are all on because every one of us, it's only a matter of time.

We're all heading in one direction and the consciousness that Aaron had at that moment is actually the consciousness that you and I should have tonight.

[19:53] Like I said, before, we live this life as if we're going to live forever. But we're not. We're coming to the point.

It is appointed unto man once to die. And the Bible is the place that reminds us of that. But it must have been a real thought for Aaron, not only that his life was now drawing to a close, but that the responsibility, the unique responsibility that God had given to him as the high priest, he would no longer carry that responsibility.

Now, if you read all the way back to the beginning, that's why I read the chapter that describes how the high priest was inaugurated at the very beginning, the clothing that the high priest that God had fashioned and designed for the high priest that symbolized the kind of work that he did, what was the high priest?

What was his, well, we'll go into that in a few moments' time, but it was a unique responsibility that was only one, and his work was to stand in between Israel and God and to offer up sacrifices.

It involved knowing a huge amount and having to be precise in every detail as to how he obeyed God's commands. It was a responsibility that Aaron took seriously all his life.

[21:28] His work became himself. He became engrossed in his work. He was identified with his role as the high priest. And now he, God was requiring him to hand that responsibility over to someone else.

That's never an easy thing, especially when we enjoy the work that the Lord has given us to do in this world. It is never an easy thing to depart from that.

But here's what Matthew Henry, the great commentator, says about Aaron. Quickly, after he was stripped away of his priestly garments, he laid himself down and died contentedly.

For a good man would desire if it were the will of God not to outlive his usefulness. Why should we covet to continue any longer in this world than while we may do God and our generation some service in it?

The greatest privilege that you and I have in this world as Christians, as God's people, is to serve the Lord, is to do what he gives us to do and to use the gifts that God has given us in this world to do for his glory and for the good of his church.

[22:55] Nothing can be better than that. Yet there will come a time for all of us when we have to leave that responsibility and to hand it over to someone else.

God and it is just as much a mark of grace to know to do just that. That's the first thing it meant to Aaron.

The second thing, I can't help thinking that there's something of the day of atonement in this passage. What happened on the day of atonement?

It happened once a year. It was the one time in the year when someone was allowed to enter into the most sacred place in the tabernacle which was called the most holy place.

That was the cubic chamber in which the Ark of the Covenant stood. No one was ever ever allowed to go into the most holy place except for the high priest on the day of atonement.

[23:56] And he had to be carrying the blood of the sacrifice with him, the blood of the goat. And that was his privilege. Only Aaron was allowed to do that.

He had done that for 40 years. Year after year. And so he knew something of the significance, not only the danger that he took upon himself every time he dared to go into the presence of God.

Because that's where the Shekinah glory of God dwelt, between the cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant. That's where the presence of God was. If he put a step wrong, then he would lose his life.

There and then. So he knew that it was a fearful thing to enter into the presence of God. And yet he was willing to do it because of the privilege and because that was his calling.

But the Day of Atonement also signified something else. It signified that one day there would be the last High Priest.

[25:02] That he would come into the world and he himself would enter into the presence of God on our behalf once and for all. That High Priest of course was the great High Priest Jesus Christ when he died on the cross and when he gave himself as the sacrifice for our sin, the once for all sacrifice for our sin.

That was everything that the Day of Atonement looked forward to because it was the moment when Jesus as our representative entered into the presence of God with his own blood and made atonement for our sin, cancelling its debt and bringing the forgiveness of God, satisfying the justice of God and bringing God's forgiveness upon all those who trust in him.

And it meant also that Aaron was now permitted to enter into the presence of God in death because that's what death is for the believer.

It's the entrance into the presence of God. The souls of believers the catechism tells us are at their death made perfect in holiness.

They do immediately listen to that word immediately pass into glory. No body still being united to Christ, they rest in the graves until the resurrection.

[26:31] But it meant thirdly the gathering to his people. Look how God, I want you to notice how God describes how Aaron is going to die. God said to Moses, let Aaron verse 24 be gathered to his people.

That's a phrase that's very often used in the Old Testament when it comes to the death of someone who has served and loved the Lord. There's another expression that is used sometimes in the Old Testament and it's a very different one, but this time it refers to the death of someone who hasn't served the Lord and that expression is they shall be cut off from their people.

See, there's a massive difference between Aaron's death, which was the gathering to his people, and the death of someone who wasn't a believer being cut off from their people.

So what does it mean? What is it meant to be? What does it mean? Well, we first of all have to understand that the Old Testament people didn't know as much as we know about what happens after death.

And the reason for that is because the New Testament has given us so much more information separation by the coming of Jesus and the writing of the apostles.

[27:55] The New Testament tells us that at death, there is a separation between the body and the soul. The soul, like I said in the catechism, goes immediately into glory.

The body rests and remains until the day when we are confident and absolutely certain that Jesus will come again and raise the dead.

Now to be gathered in the Old Testament, all they knew was that they were to be gathered to who were the people to whom they were to be gathered? Well, I would suggest to you that they were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Lord's people.

Not just because they were his ancestors, but because these were men and women of faith who had lived and died believing in the promises of God. And they too had been taken when they died to be with the Lord.

So now, now that Aaron's moment had come, it was for him a gathering to his people. The collection of God's people gathered round the throne of God that Revelation talks about, where there is that endless, perfect, blissful worship, worship, that gazing upon the Lamb of God who was slain and who is alive again and who rules forevermore, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

[29:31] That's as far as language can go to describe what God has prepared for his people. Again, the Puritan Matthew Henry says this, Aaron submits and dies in the manner appointed and for aught that appears with as much cheerfulness as if he had been going to bed.

There's only one way in which you can be prepared for that moment and that is by knowing what God has prepared for you and believing in it and laying hold upon it by faith even although we have never been there, we've never experienced it before, but that doesn't mean that God hasn't prepared us for it and prepared that place for us.

Lastly, what did it mean to Israel? The people who watched Moses and Aaron going up the mountain, it must have been a hugely solemn moment for the children of Israel knowing that the person that they knew and who had been part of their leadership, their wise leadership throughout all these years was now going to be taken from them.

But if they were thinking and asking the right questions as they watched Moses and Aaron making that last journey up the mountain, they would have been asking the most crucial question of all, the most frightening question of all, which is this, if our high priest is going to be taken from us, how are we going to be reconciled to God?

How are we going to be protected from God's anger and his wrath? Because they could remember times in their history when they came within a hair's breadth of being annihilated, destroyed or abandoned because they had disobeyed and rebelled against God.

[31:49] If you read even the chapters before then, you'll read about how Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebelled against God and how God sent a plague amongst them and that plague was only stopped when Aaron stood between God and the people.

That was what the high priest's job was. That was what his work was. He was to represent the people before God and he was to represent God before the people.

He was the mediator. He was to ensure that sacrifice was made on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis. Because that was how God had made provision for the forgiveness of their sin.

But now, if the central figure was going to die, who, how was there going to be forgiveness? Were they now going to have to face the wrath of God unleashed upon them because their high priest was taken away?

Well, this was their answer. The answer was that God commanded that first of all, his high priestly clothes were taken from him, the clothing that only could be worn by him, they were taken off and they were given in public in front of the whole assembly of Israel.

[33 : 21] They were handed over to Eliezer and I'm quite sure that as they were handed over, that was a moment of relief as that all-important question was answered.

Where is our forgiveness going to come from? God was showing that although the priest was going to die, the priesthood was not.

It was going to continue and there would still be that provision that they so depended upon for forgiveness. But God was also showing something else and you need the light of the rest of the Bible to understand this.

Do you realize how privileged you are that we can read a chapter like this in the light of the rest of the Bible? These people didn't have that. We do. We can understand what's going on here more than they did.

What's happening here? This is the first high priest ever and he's going to die. And that was the deficiency that there was in the system in those days.

[34 : 34] The high priest, the one who stood between God and the people, it came time to die. Why? Because he himself was a sinner and he had to die for his own sin as a consequence of his own sin as much as represent the people before God.

But God was preparing his own perfect way in which one day there would be another high priest, the last, the great, the high priest who would never die.

The letter to the Hebrews makes that clear to us. That where there was this great deficiency in the death of Aaron and his son would die one day and then his son would die one day and then his son would die one day and so it would continue.

Yet God was preparing the way for a priesthood that would remain forever. And tonight my sin is forgiven because I have a high priest who stood between me and God and who offered up his own life as the sacrifice for my sin and as a result of his resurrection he lives forever.

never to die again always the Bible tells me making intercession for me. And you are the same if you trust him and if you follow him.

[36 : 06] If you love him as your own personal savior. Like I said this morning when we were speaking about what the cross meant to the apostle Paul.

It meant everything to him. His salvation depended alone on what Jesus had done and the offering of himself in his death at Calvary.

We're talking tonight about exactly the same moment, the same Jesus, the same event, the same high priest who ever lives, who lives forever, to make intercession, to stand between us and God.

Is he your high priest tonight? Is he your mediator? Have you listened to him as he speaks the words of God?

The words of God are words of love. A loving God to a loving world. Words that invite the very worst of people to himself.

[37 : 23] don't ever write yourself off because God hasn't written you off. You might say, well, this Christian faith, it's only for good people. It's only for people like all these other people who are here tonight and they go to church and they do so because they're good people.

No, we don't. We come here because we're bad people. Because we've sinned against God. And the reason we want to come here is because to praise God, not to impress him.

We will never impress God by our efforts and our good deeds. We're here tonight because of what he has done for us in sending Jesus to give his life as the penalty, the payment for our sin.

He died instead of us. And he asks us and he commands us and he invites us and he calls us you he calls you tonight to come to him in faith taking accepting what he has done for you.

And he promises us and he promises you that as you accept him as your priest your savior your sins are washed clean never to be remembered again.

[39 : 06] That's the gospel the good news the good news I can't think of of any greater message in all the world than that you can be reconciled with God your maker.

You can know God for yourself. You can discover him. You can live for him. You can be the person that God wants you to be in all your fullness instead of living a broken empty lost condemned life.

Come to him tonight. Come to him because he has invited you to do so. Let's pray. Father in heaven we thank you for your word to us.

We thank you Lord for what the Old Testament signifies and points to. We thank you Lord for even what we are able to glean from a passage which is so sad and which must have been so sad for the people of Israel on that occasion and yet Lord you are the one who has turned our mourning into dancing into rejoicing and we give thanks Lord tonight that the gospel is so clear we give thanks that our salvation is not what we have deserved because we have deserved nothing but we give thanks that you have provided for us your own son and that he gave his own life for our forgiveness so Lord we pray that you will speak to each one of us and draw us to yourself in Jesus name Amen Psalm number 16 and that's the traditional verse out verse that in here we advisor about the free pro we have out in your number same