

# "Envy"

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[0:00] Good morning. It's good to see you all here. You know, when I was in high school, my friends and I had a question we would often ask each other, which is this, who died and made you king?

I don't know if you've ever asked that question yourself, a question of like, what makes you so special? Maybe you feel it in your friend group when you have a friend who always gets to choose what restaurant you end up eating at.

Or maybe it's at work where one of your co-workers always takes the role of delegating responsibilities within the team, even though it's not really their job.

Or maybe it's at church where you see someone else elevated to a role that you would hope to serve. How easy it is for us to ask the question, who died and made you king? At the heart of it is one of the classic seven deadly sins, that of the sin of envy.

It's fascinating, actually. The president of Yale, who's a psychology professor, wrote a whole book on envy and jealousy. So, if you want to go see what he wrote, you know, it's worth reading. He has a great definition of envy, which I found.

[1:22] It says this, envy is the flip side, that is the flip side of jealousy, which is a strong desire to keep what you already have. He says, in that situation, the other person has a characteristic or possession or relationship of value, and you would like it.

So, you begrudge them or feel bad that they have it and you don't. It's a combination of longing for something that you would like and feeling bad that someone else has it.

Two parts of envy, the longing and the feeling bad that someone else has it. One part of envy, the longing and the feeling bad that someone else has it and you don't have it.

We feel vulnerable and we envy. And though these longings for maybe actually, in principle, good longings, how often do our hearts twist those longings into the sin of envy?

So, how does God meet us in those longings? well this brings us to numbers chapter 12 so as you know we are preaching through the book of numbers this summer and we are going to be looking at numbers chapter 12 i think it's around page 100 i forgot to look up the number 112 112 i am told uh numbers chapter 12 and remember that the book of numbers is about the people of god and really it's about god going with his people on a journey through the wilderness on their way to the promised land right and we saw in the first 10 chapters that that in the book of numbers that the god was preparing the people to leave where they were at the foot of mount sinai where they had received the law and where god had revealed themselves to them in in a new and fuller way and then we see them in chapter 11 launch out and last week we saw that in their launching it turned badly almost immediately as pastor nick explored the complaining and grumbling spirit of israel and how we are like them prone to doubt that god can provide for us in good ways and then he reminded us of how christ is the one who reminds us that god will be faithful to provide for us so now we come to chapter 12 and it's another chapter on this journey and what we see is envy comes into the camp and we will see it in our own hearts as well let me pray for us before we continue so we bow your heads and pray lord we pray as we look at your word this morning that you will help us lord help us uh to understand your word and to see how this uh narrative story from long ago is meaningful for us today lord i pray that we would not only understand it with our minds but lord embrace it with our hearts and with our will and that we would love you and see how you are a great savior to envious people like us lord i pray for your help that you will help me to speak as i ought this morning and we pray this in jesus name amen amen so how does god meet us when envy rises in our hearts we're going to work through the story we're going to work through it chronologically so we'll read the first three chat three verses to start off um let me turn there as well and we can read god's word together numbers chapter 12 um i'm actually going to go back i didn't tell lewis this so

it's not in the slide i'm going to read the last verse of the chapter before because it frames the narrative in terms of geographically where we are from kibroth hatava the people journeyed to hazeroth and they remained at hazeroth and now starting in verse 1 of chapter 12 miriam miriam and aaron spoke against moses because of the cushite woman whom he had married for he had married a cushite woman and they said has the lord indeed spoken only through moses has he not spoken through us also and the lord heard it now the man moses was very meek more than all people who are on the face of the earth and oh and we'll stop there because the next part is really exciting and suddenly but we're going to stop there so this is the setup right where we see that aaron and moses or aaron and miriam attack moses in a fit of envy now remember these relationships if you're not familiar with the story miriam and aaron are moses's siblings they [6:57] were with him from the very beginning miriam was there when moses was miraculously rescued from the the killing of the babies in egypt and and how uh part of how he ended up in growing up in the pharaoh's court they were with moses when they were when the p when he returned to egypt and god used him and with them alongside of him uh to deliver the people of god and aaron was raised up as a spokesman for moses in exodus 4 and the first high priest in chapter 28 of exodus miriam similarly had a exalted role in this she was called a prophetess and in exodus 15:20 we see her leading the women in praise to god for the deliverance that he had done so they were like numbers two and three in the leadership organizational structure of the people of israel in some ways they were significant people right and yet they spoke against moses why might this have happened well i wonder if this is speculation but i wonder if it was partly because of what happened in chapter 11 if you remember last week after these problems uh moses appointed 72 elders and gave them some of his spirit to help rule over the grumbling and complaining people to help provide leadership and service and you wonder if aaron and miriam were like where do we fit in this they were feeling insecure and so they spoke against him and they speak in envy how do they do this well first interestingly in verse 1 they say well moses took that cushite woman to be a his wife now uh cush is a region that refers to the area the the of the headwaters of the Nile so this would be modern day nubia southern sudan ethiopia it's somewhere in that area um and this is the only reference to this woman unless it is possible that this is zipporah who you see in earlier but she was from midian and probably not true it's pro this is you know we don't have a lot of information we just know that this was a woman who was not of an israelite and moses had married her and it's interesting because the narrative just says this isn't gossip this is true right they complained about this and in fact he did this so it's not a question of fact but it's a question of meaning and it seems like miriam and aaron are saying isn't being part of the people of god being a descendant of abraham isn't it being some of the special people of god and now moses elevates this woman to be his wife who's from the outside how could this be and so that so they level this kind of attack like it's moses really loyal to god in what he's doing it seems like that's the first the first wave of attack and then you see in verse two that there's a second one right and it's similar as well like is moses really special in his role or not because they say well okay so moses is the spokesperson for god but what about us hasn't god spoken to us and through us to the people i'm the high priest i'm the prophetess don't we also have a high and it seemed that what they wanted was a similar kind of recognition they wanted the status the honor the reputation the place that moses had among the people of god now what about you and me

when do we feel envy bubbling up in our hearts i think it is most often when we feel insecure we feel insecure in our status we're not sure what our place is so if you're in high school and you look at the cool kids who swagger down the hall and everyone knows that they're like the ones who kind of rule the school and you feel insecure and you envy what they have maybe it's in our careers where we look at the person who started next to us in the cubicle next door and they've risen faster than we have through the ranks or been given positions and we envy it might be that when we feel insecure about our worth perhaps your friends are dating and you're not and you ask yourself a question what's wrong with me maybe again at church it's easy to think why haven't they asked me to do that role i also think sometimes our insecurity can come when we feel insecure about our power or agency we don't feel secure we don't feel safe when someone else has the money to pay for things that we don't and so we envy that or when we feel trapped under leadership that has authority that we don't have envy can come up in a lot of different places and as with miriam and aaron aaron when we feel envy what we most often do is to attack to undermine to want to diminish others this is what speaking against meant as aaron and miriam thought about what they were doing they're

saying who is he why is he so great right we speak against them and we tear them down in order to elevate ourselves so the first part of the story reveals to us the heart of envy and how it works how does god respond well let's keep reading starting in verse four let's look again starting in verse four and suddenly the lord said to moses and aaron and miriam come out you three to the tent of meeting and the three of them came out and the lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called aaron and miriam and they both came forward and he said hear my words if there is a prophet among you i the lord make myself known to him in a vision i speak with him in a dream not so with my servant moses he is faithful in all my house with him i speak mouth to mouth clearly and not in riddles and he beholds the form of the lord why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant moses and the anger of the lord was kindled against them and he departed so how does god respond to envy he confronts us by making us come face to face with him right this is literally what happened right god descends right there's the cloud that sits over the painting tent and and it says that god actually descended down uh and it must have been a fearsome sight for particularly miriam and aaron who hadn't seen this in the same way that moses had seen it as they're called to the tent of meeting in the center of the camp for god to call them to account

right and he starts by clarifying listen if there are prophets among us this is how i reveal myself to them and he's including miriam in that he's including uh uh aaron in that to some degree he's including others he's saying if that happens i will reveal myself in dreams and and those sorts of things so it's not that i don't honor them and give them these revelations it's just it comes in a certain way but with moses it's different verses six through eight is such a powerful defense of god's unique calling and moses's unique status he calls him my servant he says he is faithful in all my house the questions of loyalty is moses serving himself or is he serving god god affirms no he is serving me this is what he's doing he's been perfectly faithful then third he goes on he says and if you want to know what the difference though i speak in dreams to others i speak to moses face to face that's what mouth to mouth means it's it's like a diminutive of face to face um and so i speak to him clearly not in riddles not in ways that need require interpretation or have questions but i speak boldly and plainly to him and fourth he is able to see my form now it's interesting because if you remember back in exodus 33 right moses wasn't allowed to see the face of god because no one could see the face of god and live because we're all sinful people and without a mediator there's no way we can do this but but here moses god says but moses does have a unique way he sees my form in a way that no one else does because i invite him into this unique role of me being my representative to come to the tent of meeting and meet with me so this is what god is saying so moses says to them listen friends you do have a role here right i do have prophets in my midst among my people and i reveal my and i'm and and they have their role but moses is special moses is unique right and part of what he does in the midst of this particularly when he gets to the end is he reveals the deeper root of the envy because what he's really saying to moses and or to miriam and aaron is you're speaking against him is a speaking out against me because i am the one who is called moses i am the one who has given him this particular role i have sovereignly acted to do what i want to do through this man in a way that i'm not going to do it if you have your roles and i've called you to those but he has his role and i've called him to that and by speaking out against him you are rejecting me me this is why he asked the question why were you not afraid to speak out against my servant moses because he's kind of saying why were you for not afraid to speak out against me your sovereign god ten plagues on Egypt by the word of Moses. They saw God lead the people through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud and fire. They saw God part the Red Sea and destroy the Egyptian army.

They saw God give water from a rock when Moses struck it on God's command. They saw God reveal himself to Moses first and then to the people through Moses in Mount Sinai, giving them the law.

They saw God lead them away toward the promised land. And it was this God that they were questioning when they spoke against Moses in their envy. And they made the same mistake that we often do with our envious hearts. We tend to say, well, envy is all about us and other people. We see it merely on a horizontal plane, and we fall into this comparison trap, and we think, where do we fit with regard to other people? And we've excluded God completely from the picture.

[ 20 : 02 ] And God comes down, and He calls us to reckon with Him. And friends, if Miriam and Aaron had seen God do all of those things, how much more have we seen God? Because God has

rescued us from sin by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ, who was the very image of God, so that we might see God face to face, came down and walked this earth, right, full of grace and truth, the glory of God manifested in the incarnate Son of God. And we have seen Him, and we have known Him. And He has come and loved us and laid down His life to die for us in humility and in weakness so that we might be rescued and we might be saved.

And now, as God's people, He has called us into His body with various parts and various roles and various things, and He's given all of us honor in the particularities of what they've been, but not the sameness. We have the sameness of worth, but we don't have the sameness of roles.

And God asks us a question in our world and in our lives. Are you going to question the role that I have given you, the place that I have given you, the resources that I have given you, or will you allow envy to control your hearts?

And friends, this is true in lots of things, but it is particularly true as we see it here with regard to human authorities. This is one of the challenging discipleship things that this passage points us to because God has sovereignly instituted authority in our life in various ways. We have governments that we are called to submit to, even when they are ungodly. He has set roles in churches and in family and in society and workplaces, and we just chafe against it because in our human sinful hearts, we don't want anyone else to tell us what to do. And in our American spirit, in particular, we love our freedom.

I can do whatever I want. And that's not the way God has established His kingdom. And our envy at that power that authorities have been given by God expresses itself in the spirit of rebellion and stubborn resistance. Because we know where they're not perfect, so we say to them, who died and made you king?

[ 22 : 56 ] Well, there's a lot of nuance here because there are appropriate times, because human authorities are fallible, and they can be sinful. And there are times when we do stand up to unrighteousness.

But we must be very careful to recognize God has still established this broad structure for our good and for a blessing. Let me speak really plainly for a minute about church leadership. And I just, you guys know this, I'm uncomfortable. I don't want to talk about this. But the passage leads us here, and I think it's worth saying. It's easy in our day and age to speak out against church leadership or to be wary of their, of the authority that church leadership has. It's easy for us to adopt a spirit of mistrust and of distance, of skepticism and doubt. And particularly because church leaders have shown themselves to be unfaithful, they have shown themselves to be sinful, and they have not always properly responded when they have fallen.

For those of us who have a role of leadership in a church, we must look at Moses as an example. He was humble. He was faithful. Have you noticed? Moses hasn't even spoken yet in our narrative. God is the one who intervened to defend him. So we as leadership need to have that. And we need to admit and be willing to be, to be rightly confronted when we sin or when we have done something poorly.

That's the right way for human authority, for church authority to be held with humility and with gentleness and with openness to healthy feedback. But for those who are in the church to recognize God has appointed leaders over us for a reason. And we need to respect that. And we need to recognize that it's not them and whether we like them or not, or whether they do things the way we want them to or not. But it's God who has put them there. And how do we honor what God has done rather than envy and rebel?

[ 25 : 23 ] Now, friends, I say all of this with a thankful heart because I don't perceive in Trinity that there is bubbling and gurgling lots of discontent and envy and rancor and dissension among our church.

And I'm very thankful for that. And I'm thankful for our eldership where we call each other out and keep one another humble and seek to remember that we are called to be servants as we seek to be elders and shepherds of this congregation. But we need to recognize that this is a part of where envy can so easily come in and destroy a church and how easily it can become a rot in God's people.

How will God respond to such an affront of Miriam and Aaron? How will He deal with us when envy does grip our hearts? Well, this is what the rest of the passage shows us.

So, thirdly, let's look at verses 10 through 15, 10 through 16, and we'll read this together. It says, When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous like snow. And Aaron

turned towards Miriam, and behold, she was leprous. And Aaron said to Moses, O my Lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned.

Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes out of his mother's womb. And Moses cried to the Lord, O God, please heal her, please. But the Lord said to Moses, If her father had but spit on her face, should she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut outside the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again. So Miriam was shut outside the camp seven days, and the people did not set out on the march till Miriam was brought in again.

[ 27 : 35 ] After that, the people set out from Hazaroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran. Oh, friends, how does God respond to our envious hearts with justice and mercy?

This is such a beautiful picture. Remember going back to verse 9 where it says, And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them. Now, if you went back and you looked at chapter 11, you would see when the anger of the Lord kindles against people, do you know what happens? Immediate severe judgment. In verse 1, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. In chapter 11, verse 33, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck down the people with a very great plague. And when you get here, you think, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Miriam and Aaron, and bam! But that's not actually what happens. Instead, God departs. Isn't it an interesting narrative move, right? Now, it's not that there isn't judgment because you go on, and the cloud moves away, and behold, Miriam is leprous, right?

She is afflicted with a skin disease, probably not Hansen's disease, modern-day leprosy. It's probably just a skin disease, but we've heard all about skin diseases before. We didn't read it, but it's in chapter 5, where if you have skin diseases, it makes you richly unclean. You have to be put outside the camp, right? So there were consequences, and God did bring a judgment, but He didn't strike them dead. He didn't bring the fullness of His wrath. Instead, He restrained Himself in His judgment.

And Miriam and Aaron respond immediately with repentance. Aaron sees this, and as a high priest, this would have been his role to see someone who was unclean or ritually unclean or to declare them unclean again. And He turns and He pleads to Moses, please heal her. Don't let this happen to your sister. And Moses finally speaks, and like the God that He serves, He does not show anger and cutting off Miriam and saying, if you're going to be like that, I'll have nothing to do with you. No, He turns to God and He pleads for her healing. He pleads for her forgiveness. Moses has said, we know we've sinned, or Aaron said, we know we have sinned. And Moses pleads to God for their forgiveness. And notice this, God's response is twofold, right? Because one is, should she not bear the shame, right? He tells this little parable that's kind of weird, but it seems that there was maybe a pattern in that culture of if a father spits on a child, that would be a shameful thing, right? Where you're actually imparting shame on someone as a part of punishment or a part of discipline, right? And He's saying, shouldn't that then there be... there are consequences for that. Seven days, they should be ashamed because of it. But what you don't see is that what God did is He did instantly heal her. Because if you go back to chapter 5 of Numbers, someone who is afflicted with leprosy, once they have been healed and seen by the high priest as healed of leprosy, then they must stay out of the camp for seven days before they can be restored.

[ 31 : 28 ] So God instantly healed in response to Moses' plea. And yes, she did bear the consequences of being put outside the camp. The one who had complained about the inclusion of a woman from outside the camp at the beginning of the chapter was put outside the camp for a season. But do you see how it was repeated twice? Because the Lord says, let her be shut out for seven days. After that, she may be brought in.

And so the people then... so this is what happened. And the people waited at cost to themselves. Friends, if you've looked at a map, it is not more than a seven-day journey from where they are right now to the edge of the promised land. They waited a whole week that they could have been spending getting to the brink of the promised land in order to honor Miriam and take her with them as a part of their camp, as an insider. And friends, this is the mercy of a heavenly father who disciplines and loves his children. This is what we see as Moses and then God responds to the envious hearts of Miriam and Aaron.

So the message of this passage is, stop being envious, right? No. No, that's not it. I mean, yes, it is. At one level, we should not be envious, and that is a good thing. But the fact is that envy is one of those things. In Galatians 5, we saw it. It's a part of the fruit of the flesh. It is a part of our sinful

nature. And it's not, don't be envious, but when we are envious, what do we do? This is what the gospel speaks to. This is why we read Hebrews chapter 3 earlier, because how much more greater is Christ than Moses? Just as Moses interceded for Miriam in her envious heart and brought forgiveness and freedom. How much more is Christ this? Remember what we read, therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses was also faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses. The glory of the Son of God, who left heaven to come to earth so that we could see him face to face. The glory of the Son of God, who bore the envy of the religious leadership of the Jewish people in his day. The glory of Jesus who was faithful in his humility and obedience even unto death, taking the form of a servant and dying on the cross for those who envied him.

Consider the glory of the church. Consider the glory of Jesus who was put outside the camp of Jerusalem, crucified outside the city, so that those he died for, those who persecuted him, could be brought in to the people of God. Consider the glory of he now who is the head over his people, the church, who calls us with a heavenly calling to be a part of his body.

Consider his glory as the resurrected Son of God, who's exalted to a place above all others, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Christ is Lord.

[ 35 : 44 ] And friends, here's the amazing thing. We get caught up with him in that. When we feel insecure about our status, when we feel insecure about our power, when we feel insecure about our worth, the glory of Christ calls us to take those questions and to find their greatest fulfillment in him.

Because in him we are caught up in his glory. And it does un-center us. It's not about us and how great we are. It's about how great he is. But it says he is that great. So we are welcomed in to the overflow of his glory in all eternity. And so when the worm of envy begins to eat, your heart turn to Christ and remember, who died? Made him king? He did. He died so that he might be our king. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for this story. We thank you that you are a merciful God. Lord, forgive us for our envious, rebellious hearts. And Lord, help us to behold Christ in all of his greatness and glory. And Lord, in beholding that, Lord, will you free us from envy so that we might instead love and honor and respect and follow.

Thank you, Lord. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.