In the Wilderness

From Failure to Redemption

Numbers 20:2-13, Deuteronomy 34

**Introduction:** All actions have an effect or outcome – some good (positive), some bad (negative).

We reap what we sew. EG.

I am going to get it wrong. I’m going to fail. I’m going to let myself down. I’m going to offend people. I’m going to sin against God. This is a fact. And guess what, it’s not just me, it’s you too. Isn’t this the way that you want to start a Sunday morning? It’s going to happen – as a leader, an employee, neighbor, child, spouse, parent, and friend.

I’m not telling you something that you don’t already know. And I’m not trying to point out the obvious. I’m leaning into a truth that we spend our lives trying to cover up and avoid. We want to compensate for who we are and for our failures, when it is in our failure that we most clearly see our need for Christ. Jesus gave His life for sinners, not for folks who have it all together.

What if we fail and we don’t recover? We may not. What if I offend someone and the relationship will never be the same? It’s possible.

There are times when we unintentionally fail, we just get it wrong. Then there are times when we dive straight into it, with perfect form, knowing exactly what we are doing but thinking that we can get away with it.

This morning we find ourselves in the wilderness again, but this time it is a wilderness of our own making. It’s a wilderness marked by unbelief, disobedience, doubt, and pride. Wilderness that drags shame, regret, and hurt along with it. A wilderness where we have charted our own course toward the unfamiliar.

We are not *living inside God’s will, but outside of God’s blessing.*

We are *living outside of God’s will, and outside of God’s blessing.*

*Meeting a legitimate need in illegitimate ways.*

**★ In Christ, our failure is always met with the hope of redemption.**

Let’s look to Numbers chapter 20, and look at Israel and Moses again.

**Old Issues in a New Generation**

**The people were thirsty and dramatically let Moses know about it.**

**20:2-5** *2Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3And the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! 4Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? 5And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.”*

* **EG.** Groundhog Day. We’ve been here before Same situation, only 40 years later. [Exodus 17]
* Same issues, just a new generation.
* *Connection/Application:* Every generation seems to think that it is the first time for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to happen. This is a new context, a lot of life has happened, but same issues.

**God Listens and Responds**

**20:6-8** *6Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them, 7and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 8“Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.”*

* Take the staff (the one that had budded) – *God’s presence*.
* Get the people together – *God’s people*.
* Speak to the rock – *God’s word*.
* Give them water, more than the people need – *God’s provision*.
* *Connection/Application:* Moses & Aaron responded with dependence – almost as if God had been training them. They turned to the one who is in control and He met with them.

**Hearing and Halfway Listening**

**20:9-11** *9And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him.10Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?”11And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.*

* He took the staff. Check.
* He got the people together. Check.
* He spoke his mind and acted out of anger (in his old age) – rebels, struck the rock twice.
* Good first response (falling on his face). [20:6]
* Poor follow-through (not speaking to the rock).
* Only partial obedience, which is not obedience at all.
* **EG.** Listening with an assumption in mind – just like before. [Exodus 17]
* *Connection/Application:* Moses wanted God’s provision, but by his own means. Abraham and Hagar.

**There are Consequences for Acting from Unbelief**

**20:12-13** *12And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” 13These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy.*

* Moses didn’t believe in God – to uphold Him as holy.
* Moses would not lead God’s people into the Promise Land. He would not get his full inheritance.

**Failure.**   
Forty years in, almost to the promise land, things have gone generally good up to this point.

*Key Connection/Tension:*

* **We have all acted from unbelief and experienced the consequences that follow.**  *How does the text or topic connect to everyone’s daily experience?:*

**Moses’ chief offense was unbelief.** He did not uphold God as holy.

**20:12** *12And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”*

* EG.
* **Rooted in doubt** – *Will God do what He said that He would do?*
* **Rooted in pride** – *I can do what God said He would do.*
* His offense seems to be careless, just lacking self-control, or unbridled anger.

**Moses put Himself in the place of God (judge and provider).**

* The rebellious leader Moses leading the rebels.
* Self-righteous condemnation.
* Listen to us – ears.
* Watch us – eyes. Stealing the spotlight.
* Praise us – stomachs, hearts.
* Not just an ambassador impersonating the president, but the owner of all of the land, on all of the continents, in all of the world.

**Moses was self-reliant (acting out of independence).**

* **Live from belief that God is who He says that He is and does what He says He will do.**  
  *What is the command? What are we supposed to do?*
* He has shown us this in the cross.
* **We live from belief in our own ability.***How do we fail (at keeping the command)?*

**Redemption.**

*Hope/Tension met*

**God is Always with His People**God was still with Moses.He did not leave him or cut him off.

* God showed Himself holy before the people. [20:13]
* Their relationship was still present, but the consequences were evident.
* Moses still got more than he deserved (seeing the Promised land).
* **Deuteronomy 34:1-4**

*Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan,****2****all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea,****3****the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.****4****And the Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, ‘I will give it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.”*

* **Moses followed God to the mountain top, where he saw God’s promise made real in the land and in his life.**
* **Jesus went to the mountain top and fulfilled God’s promise for us.**

**Jesus was struck to be Living Water without end.**

* **Jesus’ life and death was anchored in belief in the Father – He was a better Moses. He is rock that was struck for us in order to give true and living water with no end.***How does Jesus fulfill this for us?*

**John 4:13-14**

***13****Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,****14****but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

**1 Corinthians 10:1-4**

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,****2****and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,****3****and all ate the same spiritual food,****4****and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*

**Actions lead to consequences now, but not forever.**

* **EG.** There are things that I’ve said to Holly that she can never unhear.
* There are things that we do that we can never undo or take back.
* Living in the shadow of consequence reminds us of the light shining on the other side.
* We live in the consequences of our actions with God’s kind grace toward us as our companion. We seek to be restored to others. We seek to not repeat our mistakes a second or third time. We live by the power of God’s spirit inside of us, and not the weakness of our flesh.

**Our response to failure reveals the condition of our hearts.**

★ **In Christ, our failure is always met with the hope of redemption.**

**James 4** & **1 Peter 5** - “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

* **We are able to honestly approach our unbelief with no need to compensate for it. I am not all-powerful. I am not all-knowing. I am not all-present. But Christ is all of these things for me. In Christ I am able to live in my humanness and uphold God as holy.***How are we empowered to obey?*
* **How does the text or topic connect to everyone’s daily experience?:** We have all acted from unbelief and experienced the consequences that follow.
* **What is the command?** **What are we supposed to do?:** Live from belief that God is who He says that He is and does what He says He will do.
* **How do we fail (at keeping the command)?:** We life from belief in our own ability.
* **How does Jesus fulfill this for us?:** Jesus’ life and death was anchored in belief in the Father – He was a better Moses. He is rock that was struck for us in order to give true and living water with no end.
* **How are we empowered to obey?:** We are able to honestly approach our unbelief with no need to compensate for it. I am not all-powerful. I am not all-knowing. I am not all-present. But Christ is all of these things for me. In Christ I am able to live in my humanness and uphold God as holy.
* **So what?**
* **Now what?**