

Miriam, Hero, or Villain?

Alison and I are reading through the book of Exodus at the moment, and Miriam's name was mentioned, Exodus 15:20. She is described as a prophet. If you are not sure who she is, she is the sister to Aaron and Moses. I was drawn to Numbers 12, and remembered as I was reading, that a family feud has kicked off. But I am also wondering why God has brought me to this passage in particular.

Numbers 12

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite wife. "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't He also spoken through us?" And the Lord heard this. (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them went out.

Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; He stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, He said, "listen to my words: when there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" The anger of the Lord burned against them, and He left them. When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam's skin was leprous – it became as white as snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease, and he said to Moses,"

please my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed.

Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming out from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away." So, Moses cried out to the Lord," Please, God, heal her!"

The Lord replied to Moses," If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." So, Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back. After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the desert of Paran.

Through this story there are some important lessons we can learn about the problem of bitterness. Holding on to a grudge, past or present. I have had plenty of those over the years, but God has been working on me in praying for forgiveness. There are people I have known that have carried grudges for 30 years. They can still tell you in detail about what happened and how they were done wrong. A grudge can turn into an ever-present resentment.

Some people pick up that grudge and throw it on their shoulders and carry it wherever they go. A bit like backpack full of rocks. They will not drop the backpack, it becomes something like a safety blanket, in their mind, it becomes a part of them, familiar. It could be a sign of weakness to let go of it, or admitting that they were wrong, and the other person was right. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, **'Get rid of all bitterness, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every kind of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.'**

So, what makes us bitter? Bitterness is not usually a sudden reaction, it is subtle, anger is usually the first reaction. When someone offends us, we usually get angry first, then when we focus on the offence, we get bitter. The more we think about it, the more we become angry and bitter, vicious circle.

Miriam and Aaron focused on what they thought Moses was doing wrong, they allowed this to fester in their hearts.

Have you ever felt like this? The problem is when we start down this road, we think more about the problem and we take our eyes off Jesus. Bitterness begins as a seed, then takes root and spreads like cancer throughout our whole body, and we can infect others with it too. Hebrews 12:15 says, **‘See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many’**. The problem is, pride can take over our lives if we are not careful, Proverbs 13:10 says, **‘Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.’**

So, basically Miriam said, and Aaron obviously agreed because he did not stop her, “Who does Moses think he is?” (paraphrase). It is important to point out that the middle letter in “pride” is the letter “i.” Have you ever heard yourself, or others saying things like, **“I was done wrong? I do not deserve that. I deserve better. I don’t appreciate that.”**

Pride will not allow us to admit where we may have been wrong, or where we may have responded wrongly, or misjudged. Pride leads us to bitterness. We feel that we are above being treated in such a way. **“How dare they treat me that way!”**

1. Jealousy overtakes us. Numbers 12:2b

“Why did he get that position and not me? I am as qualified as he is.” “Why do they always have the money for nice things and we struggle to just pay the bills? Why do they drive a new car and I drive this old banger?” Again, these are things I have heard people say. Come to think of it, I too have said these things, before I met Jesus. Jealousy can easily and quickly turn into bitterness. We begin to resent the success, money, possessions, or position of others.

Miriam helped to rescue Moses as a baby (Exodus 2:1-10). Can’t you just hear her saying, **“I helped raise that boy and now he’s**

embarrassed us by marrying that woman. After all I've done for him."

Even though we try to give to others with the attitude of "no strings attached," it is extremely hard to have no expectations. It is easy until someone we have given to, wrongs us. I have found that the hardest thing to do.

2. Those in authority

Moses was the spiritual leader of Israel. It is easy to get bitter at those in authority (spiritual leaders, boss at work, parents). Maybe we don't like the decisions they make. Maybe we feel we should be the leader. Because leaders are in the public spotlight, we can tend to see their faults very quickly. We forget they are human. We feel like we are as smart and gifted as they are. "Who are they to tell me what to do?" Bitterness can creep in. An old Pastor friend of mine used to say, 'people go home to have their roast chicken after the service, then for seconds they roast the Pastor', because of what was said from the pulpit.

3. Those who are in our family (Church family too)

We live with them and we see their faults daily. Thus, the reason for passages that Paul gave to the family, like Colossians 3:18-21, **'Wives submit to your husbands, as is fitting to the Lord. Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.'** This is why we have the issues today. The issues with women wanting to feel safe when they walk the streets at night. We need to teach our children to respect, and that starts in the home, as parents. We expect love and understanding from our family, we have high expectations but when we are done wrong, bitterness can creep in.

It could be as high as 90%, of our bitterness falls into one of these three categories: **someone we were once close to, someone in authority, or someone in our family.**

What is the main result of bitterness? Division. Numbers 12:4-5, **'At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So, all three of them came out. Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; and stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam.**

When we get bitter, we create a division between us and the person we are bitter at. It happens automatically, like 2 follows 1, like B is after A. We build walls that separate and divide, and we can give justification for those walls. Then some of us try and hide the bitterness, but the bitter vibes are there. Ever been bitter at another person and tried to hide it? How is that going for you? It upsets God when we do that. Numbers 12:6-11, when both of them stepped forward, He (God) 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; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam – leprous like snow.**

Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; and he said to Moses,' Please my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have foolishly committed. Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with half its flesh half eaten away."

Bitterness grieves the Holy Spirit. God is never going to say, "You know buddy, you're right, stay bitter, you've got a right to be bitter." Ephesians 4:30-32. Whether Moses was right or wrong, that was not the issue for God. The issue was envy, jealousy, and bitterness. Something we find in our churches all too often. Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to

die. Physical sickness, Numbers 12:10, Bitterness is a form of stress, and it can destroy you physically and put you in an early grave.

The question is, who do you hurt the most when you are bitter? Yourself! You are allowing that other person to control you, and that hinders to your Christian walk. Numbers 12:15b Miriam brought herself and all the people to a standstill. Bitterness must be dealt with, in us as people, and within the church. If it is not, then our Bible reading becomes mechanical, prayer is lifeless, and our service for the Lord is fleshly.

Allow me to encourage you. If you have a bitterness issue in your life, take it to the Lord. But, if you would like a chat about it, you know where I am, just give me a call. Miriam got caught up in feeling sorry for herself and pointing the finger at Moses, thinking that was her right to do so. Society is full of people that say, blame the other person. Just watch the adverts on the T.V. tonight. It is okay to be angry, that is an emotion God gave us, but it is not okay to be bitter. Bitterness comes from anger because we have not dealt with it! So deal with it!!

Let us Pray....

Father God thank you for Miriam. Thank you for her willingness to serve You, first and foremost. Father, thank you for the lessons we can learn from Miriam and her life. Help us Lord, to get rid of any bitterness, anger, and frustration that we might be holding on to, so that we can be more affective for You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Blessings

Mike