

There have been many stories in the news over the last few months that have made me pause and think again about sin and grace. I'm a news watcher – I start each day with the news, which may not always be a great idea since oftentimes I'm wound up before the day even begins! I also scroll quite a bit on Facebook, and get quite angry and upset with the things I read. I look at our world and it just seems so broken and I start to wonder how we can ever right it. What's wrong is now right and what is right is now wrong. Yet in spite of that **sin is still sin, but even greater than that grace is still grace**. So with that in mind I want to look at a story that calls out sin, but calls out grace as well. I think there are some things there that we can learn and apply to our own lives this morning. That story is found in Numbers 12 (4<sup>th</sup> book), but put a finger there and then flip to the middle to Psalm 103 because we need that verse in mind as we read the story. Before we read the strange story of a lady named Miriam we need to read these verses in Psalm 103 to give us hope that all is not lost before it even begins.

Psalm 103:7-18

And now, flip back over to Numbers 12. The first time we see Miriam is in the book of Exodus when she helps her mother to keep her baby brother, Moses, safe during the years in Egypt when Pharaoh wants to kill all the baby boys. Moses' mother hides him and then finally when she can keep him quiet no longer she puts Moses into a basket to float down the Nile River. Miriam stays put to watch over the baby and see what happens. Pharaoh's daughter finds him and Miriam rushes over to offer the assistance of her mother who could feed the baby for her. Moses then grows up and God calls him to lead his people out of slavery and out of Egypt and

Miriam is right there beside little brother to help. She's there when they leave Egypt and when they cross the Red Sea on dry ground she leads the women in a song of praise to God for this miraculous event. Miriam serves God and serves her brother, and then we have this story in Numbers 12.

The first thing we see is that **SIN IS SIN**.

They've been out in the dessert for some time now and Miriam gets a little annoyed with her brother and starts grumbling about him, making some accusations, and generally just being jealous of that fact that he's in charge. She asks, "Has the Lord only spoken through Moses? Hasn't He also spoken through us?" Fair enough – God's used Miriam and her other brother, Aaron, so why does Moses get all the accolades? And here is where everyone of us in the room who has a brother or sister say – what's the big deal – we've all complained about a sibling. Is that not ok? Is that not normal? Who hasn't had that moment where you complain – why is she the favorite? But, God calls her on it. Sin is Sin.

Miriam could have said – well at least I didn't kill a man like Moses – remember that back in Egypt and then Moses ran off for like 40 years? Or at least I didn't build a huge golden calf like Aaron did a while back. Completely lost his mind and disobeyed. All I did was say a few – not exactly untrue things – and I'm the one in trouble? But, **God wasn't interested in comparing her sins with those around her. This was about her sin because sin is sin.**

Here's how you know you're in trouble, when God says all 3 of you come out to the Tent of Meeting right now and then He comes down in a pillar of cloud and meets with you. In this instance God doesn't go through anyone else – not a leader, not a

prophet – He comes and meets with them himself. This isn't normal – this is bad. But, remember what we read in Psalm 103? He's slow to anger – He didn't become angry at Miriam in a matter of seconds – this wasn't a matter of catching God on a bad day, and remember, too, that God has compassion on his children in the same way that a father has compassion on his children. So with that in mind God calls them forward as you would guilty children – stand here, look at me, listen to my words – are you listening? This is parenting at its best – this is finger out - Do you understand me? Type parenting. The kind where a question is asked at the end, but you're not sure if you're supposed to answer or not – Miriam doesn't by the way. Hebrews 12 talks about this kind of discipline telling us this **“word of encouragement that addresses us as a father addresses his son: It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”**

God met with her face to face to deal with her sin and disobedience not because He was waiting for her to mess up, not because He'd had it with her and all the others and He chose to take it out on her, but because she was His child and He loved her.

**Sin is sin and God met with Miriam face to face to deal with it out of His great compassion for His daughter whom He loved.**

God not only called her on it and met her face to face, but He also brought punishment because He couldn't wink at sin. Sin is sin. God leaves the meeting and Miriam is stricken with scaly skin the color of snow. The Bible calls it leprosy, but it's not the type of leprosy that we know as Hansen's disease today. This was a skin affliction that most likely left scales on her skin turning it white and flaky. Sin is ugly and destroys us and for Miriam that ugly sin that was eating at her on the inside becomes ugliness on the outside too. Everyone can see what sin has done. Aaron immediately asks Moses to cry out to the Lord for mercy and healing, and Moses does. It's not a long nor eloquent prayer it's simply the cry of his heart – O God, please heal her. And that's all it took. There was still punishment – this skin condition lasted 7 days – because sin is sin and God doesn't wink at sin. You're okay, it's just the one time – no sin is sin. But, remember Psalm 103

**He will not always accuse**

**He will not harbor his anger forever**

**He does not treat us as our sins deserve**

**He won't repay us according to our iniquities**

**He still loves us**

**He removes our transgressions from us**

**He no longer sees our sins**

**He has compassion on his children**

Sin is sin, but the second thing in this story is that **GRACE IS GRACE**

Miriam understands the consequence of her sin, but then she hears that she can be brought back. She isn't cut off forever. You see **God's grace won't leave us outside of the camp, but, rather, it restores us and brings us back inside.**

Miriam is placed outside the camp and might have been thinking – I've really messed up now. God himself showed up to call out my sin – how can I ever go back to the camp? The camp is where God's people are – it's a place of protection and safety, a place where God's presence dwells, but now she's outside of that. But, grace won't leave her there. Sin separates us from God, but grace restores us and brings us close. Sin is no match for the forgiveness and grace of God. Sin is sin but grace is grace.

Because of that grace she is healed as well. **Healed not only from the skin condition she was afflicted with, but healed of the sin condition of her heart as well.** Jesus would years later ask the Pharisees after they witnessed him forgive a man of his sins and then command him to walk, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" It was no problem for God to bring healing both inwardly and outwardly that day. Was there still a consequence – yes, because sin is sin, but there was healing that day because grace is grace. The attitude of her heart changed as God brought healing to her body, mind, and soul.

Lastly, grace is grace, because it has the last word. Past sin doesn't define who we are. **Psalm 130:3, says, "If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you."** Miriam found forgiveness and the final record we have of her is found in the book of Micah chapter 6 where the prophet writes the words of God who reminds the people that He brought them out of Egypt and gave them Moses to lead them along with Aaron and Miriam. Grace restored her to her place so that she could serve and it isn't her sin that defines her or gives her a legacy because grace is grace. Her legacy is one of service unto God not one of sin. **Sin put her outside the camp, but grace brought her back where she could be restored.**

So what does a strange story about punishment, leprosy, and talking bad about siblings, have to do with me? Well, everything!

God is not afraid to call out the sin in our lives either. Sin is sin. He isn't interested in our excuses for why we've sinned or what everyone else is doing. Well, at least I didn't... This isn't about measuring up to anyone else it's about what's going on in your life. When I read the story I think was it really that bad – what she said? But, God knew what was in her heart and called her on it. That's what makes me stop and take stock of my own life. What are the attitudes of my heart? What are the actions that come pouring out as a result? How do I treat other people? What do I do with God's word – obey or disobey? Miriam was a leader among her people, a prophet in her own right who heard from God, yet she allowed herself to fall victim to sin. Sin is sin and God calls us on it so that we can repent and find forgiveness.

God meets with us face to face as well. God looked and saw a broken world and sent himself not in the form of a pillar of cloud, but in the form of His Son, Jesus, to take on the sin of the world. John the Baptist, when seeing Jesus, proclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" 1 Peter tells us that **"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.**" He took our sins so that we no longer have to bare them. We don't have to continue sinning.

God longs to be in right relationship with his children – it's why He went to such great lengths to send His son to die for us. He meets with us to confront our sin out of His great love and compassion for us not so that He can prove how wrong we are. We read from Hebrews already in talking about discipline – it's out of love – the same love that an earthly father or mother have for their children that God shows us where we're going wrong. I don't think my parents hate me because as a child they had to tell me not to touch a hot stove. I don't think that my parents are still angry at me years later because as a child they disciplined me for being mean to my sister. They did it to protect me and to teach me how to treat others. God isn't mad at you – He loves you – and wants to protect you from the danger of sin – He longs to teach you and show you a better way and so He confronts you on your sin to deal with it and restore relationship.

God didn't wink at Miriam's sin and He doesn't wink at ours either. You might think that you're getting by with something – God understands – we have an understanding about.... – No, you don't. Sin is sin. That thing you're doing that you've convinced yourself isn't really cheating – God doesn't think you're clever and

wink at that – it’s sin. The way you’re treating your spouse – contrary to the word of God – God said to love your wife as Christ loved the church and He gave His own life for the church – how are you treating your spouse? God doesn’t wink at our actions or look the other way. Sin is sin.

Sin costs us something and God knows that, but Jesus already paid the price so that we don’t have to continue living that way. Sin separates us from God and that’s why God cares so much about it. He cares because He wants to be in right relationship with you. **Sin put you outside of the camp, but grace longs to bring you back.**

**Ephesians 2:12** says, “remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” You might be living outside the camp right now, but you don’t have to.

There is a way for you to be brought near - it’s through the blood of Christ. He shed His blood for us! **Ephesians 1:7**, says, “**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.**” Sin is sin, but grace is grace and it has been lavished on us. It means extravagant quantities of grace have been poured out on us. We don’t have to live outside of God’s camp, outside of His plan and purpose, outside of His presence. Because of His grace we who were far off – far away from Him in our sin – living without hope - we have been brought near. Miriam was brought back in the camp and traveled with them for the 40 years they wandered in the dessert and was never



separated again. We can be brought near to God – never to be separated – because of His shed blood.

So how do we receive this? How do we receive healing as Miriam did – healing both inside and out from sin? We repent and cry out as Moses did – O God, please heal me! Please, save me! **Romans 10**, says, **“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** Everyone – yes, but I’ve done.... – everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and brought near. Everyone can be healed of the sin in their heart because grace is grace.

And, finally, just as sin and shame wasn’t Miriam’s lasting legacy, it doesn’t have to be yours either. **Grace is grace and the grace and mercy of the Lord in your life can be your legacy as well.** Hear again the words of Psalm 103:

**He does not accuse you**

**He isn’t angry with you**

**He doesn’t treat you as your sins deserve**

**He loves you**

**He has forgiven you**

**You are His child**

The beginning of that chapter says, **“Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.”**

Sin is sin, but it can be dealt with today. Don't leave it, don't keep living that way – outside of the camp and away from His presence. Because grace is grace today and it's more than sufficient. Jesus died for you and because of that you don't live away from God. You can be brought near. You can be forgiven. You can be His child. You can live with Him.

Let's pray.