

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today's sermon is called, "Pride and prejudice." The Bible readings we have heard today all speak about these sins and their dangers. They are downright destructive sins that are at the heart of many other wrong attitudes, words and actions. Where they are found, they are rarely alone. Where there is pride and prejudice, we also typically see jealousy, discontentment, discouraging words, back stabbing, lack of productivity, self-righteousness, being overly critical, nit picking and much more.

Let's take a look at pride and prejudice more closely through today's sermon text found in Numbers 12. Through this Word from our God, I pray we will (1) identify more clearly the pride and prejudice we find in our lives. (2) I pray we will more clearly understand what God thinks about such sins, and how he reacts to them. (3) I want us understand how we can receive forgiveness for such sins. And finally, (4) I pray that God would fill us with a renewed Spirit-given humility.

Allow me to remind you of the context. The people of Israel had received God's law at Mount Sinai. They were now traveling to the Promised Land for the first time. They had not yet begun the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. In other words... at this point, they think they're on a straight-line journey to inhabit the land. Leading God's people was Moses. Aaron, Moses' brother, was the high priest for the people. And Moses' sister, Miriam, was a prophetess who spoke God's Word among the people. But even in this family of believers, there was jealousy and discord. We see pride and prejudice. Our text begins:

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. 3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

Poor Moses. He was a humble, God-fearing man who had the impossible task of leading a whole nation of well over a million people as they journeyed to a distant land. They had just complained about their hardships and that had angered God. He showed His anger by sending a fire that consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. Soon again they started wailing - "Why can't we have meat? - we're getting tired of manna." And God gave them the quail but those who had complained were struck with a plague and killed.

And in today's text, to make matters worse, his own brother and sister turn against him and were jealous of his power and authority. Miriam wasn't satisfied to be the sister of Moses and a prophetess. She wanted some *real* power over the people. The text hints Miriam was the instigator of this revolt. Aaron was kind of a wishy washy guy who followed who ever was most opinionated (cf, golden calf story.) Aaron wasn't satisfied to be the high priest of God's chosen people. He also wanted more authority. Pride and prejudice. These were two sins that took root in the hearts of Moses' brother and sister.

How often do we act like Miriam and Aaron? Pride and prejudice infect our hearts as well. Are we always satisfied with who we are and what we have? Are we sometimes jealous of other people? ... jealous of their talents and abilities? ... jealous of their job or position? ...jealous of their family relationships? ...jealous of possessions? We are guilty, aren't we? Have

you ever said (or thought) something like: “I’m smarter than him! I should have his job!” or “I hate so-and-so. She has so many talents it makes me sick!” or “It’s not fair that he’s so rich! We came from similar backgrounds. And I’m smarter.” Our jealousy of others can take many different forms. But all jealousy is caused by sinful pride. It comes from a heart that believes that we are better than others, and God has held something back from us that we feel we deserve. Whether we realize it or not, when we are jealous of others, we are telling God, “You made a mistake! I deserve better! God, you are wrong!” Do you see the dangerous nature of sinful pride?

There is a **second sin** we fall into together with pride, and that is **prejudice**. The proud person has the preconceived notion that all others are inferior to him. We become highly sensitive to the faults and shortcomings of others. Prejudice is our sinful attempt to justify our pride. This is what Miriam and Aaron did. **First** they called attention to the fact that Moses had a Cushite wife. Today, also, interracial marriages often draw the ridicule of others. Miriam and Aaron used this as evidence that Moses wasn’t fit to be the sole leader of Israel. Their **second** point was that God had not only spoken through Moses, he had also spoken through Aaron as the high priest, and through Miriam as a prophetess. Since God has spoken through them, they were equally fit to lead Israel. Or so they thought. Their pride caused them to be prejudiced against Moses.

When we are proud and jealous of others, we too will find prejudice in our lives. We find the spec in our brother’s eye and miss the plank that’s in our own eye. From this prejudice comes also the sin of gossiping. Who do you usually gossip about? I would guess that you gossip most about those whom you are jealous of. And you are jealous because of sinful pride. Our sinful nature tries to humiliate those who have more than we do. Since we are unable to have what they have, instead we try to take away what they have by ruining their reputation.

Do you recognize the sins of pride and prejudice in your life? God is calling us today to take an honest look. And how does God feel about these sins?

4 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 came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, 6 he 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. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 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?” 9 The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. 10 When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, a like snow.

When God spoke, he corrected Miriam and Aaron. God didn’t even address their concern that Moses had a Cushite wife. This fact obviously had no impact on Moses’ leadership abilities. But God did point out that he spoke to Moses in a unique way. Typically, God spoke to prophets in dreams and visions. But to Moses, he spoke directly. Miriam and Aaron could not claim the same. God’s will was that Moses alone be the leader of Israel. Personal attacks against Moses’ character would not change this fact. God was angry at Miriam and Aaron. God made that clear. And he afflicted Miriam with leprosy because of her sin.

How does God feel about our sins of pride and prejudice? God made very clear how he feels about such sins. God is equally angry with us when we are proud, jealous of others, and when we are not satisfied with what he has given us. And his punishment for such sins is worse than a disease that eats away the skin. His punishment is eternal separation from in hell.

Why is God so angry at such sins? Let's think of an example from our every day life. Imagine you go to your friend's birthday party. He invites you into his house. You congratulate him on his birthday and give him a gift... a very expensive gift. You saved your money for a whole year to buy this one gift which you knew was perfect for him. He takes your gift, and responds, "What is this? This is all you gave me? This is not enough! I deserve more!" Such an attitude to your precious gift would likely make you angry. How do you think God feels when we, his children, receive his precious gifts, and then we respond, "What is this, God? This all I get? This is not enough! I deserve more! I want what this other person has!" Such an attitude offends the holy Lord God. And actually, we should be terrified when we commit such sins. Our punishment would be well deserved.

But let's not go home in despair. Let us not leave terrified that God's punishments will soon come upon us. Our text also shows us a merciful God.

Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; 11 and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. 12 Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away." 13 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!" 14 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." 15 So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.

Moses prayed to God that he would have mercy on Miriam. God did have mercy on Miriam and healed her leprosy. Because of the leprosy, Miriam was unclean, and would have to stay outside the camp for seven days, as was required by the law God had given Moses on Mt. Sinai. Nevertheless, God completely healed her of her disease. He forgave her completely... and Aaron too.

Miriam didn't deserve this favor from God. If God had struck her dead for her rebelliousness, he would have acted justly. But God demonstrates his love in that he forgives the repentant even though they do not deserve it!

The God who forgave Miriam and restored her health is the same God who forgives us and gives us spiritual life. To remove our guilt, our heavenly Father sent his son Jesus Christ to live with us in our world. Unlike us, our Savior did not suffer from pride. He was never jealous of anyone. He never envied the honor and position which the hypocritical Pharisees enjoyed. He was never jealous of the wealth of the tax collectors. The Lord Jesus never attempted to ruin the reputation of others to make himself look good. Although Christ lived in poverty, he was always satisfied with the daily bread his Father provided him. Christ Jesus offered to the Father the perfect life we failed to live. And he offered the Father his death as the sacrifice for our every sin of jealousy. The Father accepted the work of his Son. We are holy in his sight. We are cleansed. We are fit for life with God and service to him.

Assured of God's love and forgiveness, we have no reason for pride, prejudice or jealousy. We have no reason to be dissatisfied with God's gifts. He has given us all good things!

Forgiven by Jesus, God also empowers us to live in humility and contentment. We've been looking at the negative behavior of Miriam and Aaron. But let's pause and look at a positive example in our text. What's significant here is what is NOT said. What was Moses' reaction this coup? He certainly could have responded with pride and spoken of his unique leadership gifts, and unique calling from God. He could have gotten defensive and given them a good tongue lashing. Or he could have done what leaders often did in those days. When there's a coup, you eliminate your rivals. He could have had them put to death so there would be no dispute over who was in control. But he doesn't. Moses left the matter in God's hands, knowing God would deal with it. So what we see here is a stark contrast. Moses behaves in the exact opposite way Miriam and Aaron behave.

Pride and prejudice. Two deadly sins that go hand in hand. May God make us like Moses and not like Miriam and Aaron. May he show us our sin, show us our forgiveness in Christ Jesus, and may he strengthen us to live for Christ a life of humility and contentment.

We pray: "Dear heavenly Father, forgive us for our pride and prejudice that's present in thoughts, words and actions. Christ, have mercy on us. Thank you, God, for your love and forgiveness even for this sin. Thank you for providing all that we need for life now and in eternity. Give us true humility and contentment, and show us ways we can live it in our daily life. In Jesus' name. Amen."