

Sermon Manuscript

Theme: Being Jealous for Your Gifts

- Parts: 1) They are a special gift from God (vv. 4-6, 11-16)
 2) They are for the glory of God (24-29)
-

“Mine!” That is one of the first words that a young child will learn. As much as we try to teach a child to share and be kind, that selfish word still comes out quite frequently, “Mine.” Children can be playing with a toy, see another and want that toy instead, not satisfied with the one they have, but constantly wanting more. “Mine!” Children can also be very jealous for the things that belong to them, or even things that don’t belong to them. Jealousy can be a nasty emotion, there is certainly a negative stigma. But jealousy can be used in a positive way. God describes himself as a jealous God. He doesn’t want to share his glory with anyone or anything, and rightfully so. We can be jealous in a positive way too. We can be jealous for the gifts that God has given us, by recognizing that they are undeserved gifts from God and that they are to be used for God’s glory.

As opposed to what the title of the book says, the book of Numbers is not just about numbers. It chronicles the journey of the Israelites after they have left Mt. Sinai all the way until they reach the Jordan River before they cross into the Promised land. That’s 40 years of Israelite history rolled into this book. Just before this chapter begins the people had set out from Mt. Sinai. They had been through an amazing event. The Lord himself proclaimed he was going to be their God and they were going to be his people. He gave them laws and commands to show their thanks and show themselves to be separate from the rest of the nations. They were now going to follow God to the Land he had promised to their ancestors. But not three days out the people already began to complain of their hardships. This angered the Lord. He punished the people by sending fire, the people repented, and the Lord relented from his anger. Sadly, this would be a very common pattern for the people of Israel on their journey through the desert. They would repeat this pattern not long after as we see in the text.

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

That “rabble” is the group of people who were not of Israelite descent that came with the Israelites on their journey. Their complaining spreads fast through the rest of the camp. They are all complaining because they don’t have the foods they want or like. They wanted meat and the foods they had in Egypt. Interestingly they say this food came “**at no cost.**” It is sad to see how quickly the people have forgotten about their slavery and misery back in Egypt. Not only do they forget about their hard times, they are so very quick to dismiss the manna that God has been giving to them for sustenance every single day of their journey. Now think about just how wonderful a miracle this manna was. It was able to sustain around 2 million people every single day. That is a lot of bread. But instead of rejoicing in it, they despised it. They despised the special gift God had so graciously given his people. It got so bad that Moses could hear the people complaining from their tents throughout the camp. He also noticed that the Lord had become angry at his people, and rightfully so.

Moses became troubled by this whole ordeal. Moses was the go between for God and the people of Israel. He spoke on behalf of the people to God and on behalf of God to the people. So Moses has to deal with, not only an upset and complaining people, but also an angry God who was ready to punish his people for their defiance. At his wits end he approaches God and talks with him. **He asked the LORD, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? 12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? 13 Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ 14 I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.”** Moses was upset with the position he was in. He blamed God for the mess that he was in. He claimed it wasn't fair to put the burden of all these people upon his soldiers. How could he bear it? He said it would be better for him to die then to continue living.

Both Moses and the Israelites complained about the gifts that had been given to them. They thought they deserved better than what they had. The truth is they didn't deserve it at all. All of these gifts were blessings from God that sprang from his mercy. The Israelites had done nothing to deserve these gifts. If it wasn't for the grace of God, they all would have died as slaves in Egypt. God had promised to be their God and they would be his people. He promised to be with them to strengthen them, preserve, protect, provide for them and so much more. But not even three days in, they complain about the blessings they have.

One of the hardest parts about reading about the Israelites in the desert, is seeing just how easily you can relate to them. It's not hard to see how easily we fall into the same pitfalls as the Israelites. I can certainly see myself doing the same thing in this situation. I think back to all the times I complained about not being wealthy enough, how I should be better at training to be a pastor, my responsibilities of being a husband and so on. I know how easy it is for all of you to do the same thing, whether you complain about your position on your sports team, the paycheck you're getting, the food your parents put on your plate at dinner time, the house or apartment you're living in, the car you're driving.

The thing we all share in these cases is that we are complaining and despising the gifts that God has given us. In his infinite mercy God has laid out so many things for us that they almost seem like a miracle too. He gives us family, food and drink to nourish us, jobs that provide for our well-being, roofs over our heads. Day-in and day-out God showers us with blessings. How do we repay him? We roll our eyes at God and tell him it's not enough, we want more. Our sinful nature wants everything we can possibly imagine and then some. We think it unfair that God only gives us so little. We think we deserve more, when in reality we don't deserve any gifts. What we deserve for our sinful words and actions is God's wrath and punishment. And yes, those words and actions are sinful. Just look at how God reacted to the Israelites. He was angry with them and their sin. Sins earn us everlasting punishment in hell. And no matter what we do, no matter what we try, the only thing we deserve is hell.

But there is another gift that we have. One far more important than the rest. One that deals with our sinful condition and our unthankful hearts. That is God's gift of a Savior, Jesus Christ. God sent that gift in the form of a new born baby, who grew up and lived a perfect life for you and for me. Then he suffered for us, he died on a cross taking the sins of the whole world upon himself, yes, even those sins of selfishness, greed, and defiance. Then God raised him from

the dead, assuring us that all of our sins had been payed for. What an astounding gift. Jesus truly was the greatest gift there ever was. Because of him we now know we have an eternity in heaven. Out of love and joy for what God has done we give thanks, and just not only for what he has done, but for what he continually does for all of us. All of those gifts that we receive, whether material, or physical are continuously and graciously given to us. So naturally, we are going to be thankful for all of them We do this by the way we think or speak about them, the way we use them in our everyday lives, how we pray about and for them. We do all of these things realizing that they are undeserved gifts from our loving God.

Now just being thankful isn't the only thing we are to do with the gifts God has given us. They serve a purpose. As we continue reading in our lesson we see Moses gathering the elders to the tent of meeting. God had graciously promised Moses he was going to give him help and relief in his duty of leading the people. Once they have been gathered, they start to prophecy. Now they weren't all seeing visions and telling the future, that's not what it means here. They were simply speaking the Word of the Lord that was being given to them by the Spirit. In doing so they were giving glory to God because of the wonderful gift of prophesying he had given them. Now for whatever reason, 2 of the elders were not at the tent of meeting but were in the camp. They started to prophecy too. When Joshua, who was Moses' right-hand man heard about this, he got jealous for Moses sake. he didn't think it was right that these guys were speaking not under the authority of Moses. He tells Moses that he should put an end to their prophesying. but Moses gives an interesting reply. **“Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”** Moses was not concerned about his own glory. He didn't need or want the glory of being the one who was giving these gifts, because he wasn't. God was the one who gave these gifts and for whom the elders were using that gift to glorify.

Just like Joshua, we need a reality check too. We can get caught up in our own selves and misuse those undeserved gifts that God has given us. It may seem good to us when we use those gifts for ourselves. It feels good knowing people are seeing how great your gifts are. How important they make you look. You may try to sing a little louder in church so that others will certainly hear your Pavarotti-esque voice. You might want to showboat on the field, letting the whole crowd know just how good you are. Or you might want to brag just a little bit longer to your coworker, making sure they know how faithful of an employee you are. Even worse, whenever we see someone else who may have the same gift or an even better gift, we become jealous. We hope, and we try to make that person look bad or to outshine that person. We don't want to share our glory, we only want to grow it. And every time we try to put ourselves first and try to grow our own glory, we take away from giving glory to God. Whenever we act in this way we diminish just how important God is to us. We point to our own glory instead of the glory of the one who gave us the gift in the first place.

How much worse when we act this way with our gifts in matters of the church. We try to outshine each other, thinking about who the better worshiper is, who is the better evangelist, who's the better giver when the offering plate comes around. In those actions we act no better than the child I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon. We feel threatened and jealous that someone might outshine us and take away what glory we had built up for ourselves. This is the exact kind of behavior Moses was rebuking Joshua for. This is also the same kind of attitude Jesus rebukes his disciples with in the Gospel of Mark near the end of chapter 9. The disciples come to Jesus because there was a man who was healing the sick in Jesus' name, but wasn't a part of their group. The disciples were jealous and wanted Jesus to have the man stopped. But

Jesus points out they shouldn't be trying to stop someone who was on their side. Jesus told them to not get in the way of anyone who was doing work in his name. Likewise, Moses didn't want to stop anyone who was prophesying in the name of the Lord. So why should we try to stop those who are using their gifts for the glory of God.?

Brothers and sisters, in everything you do, remember the one gift that God gave us in Jesus Christ. Through him we have the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternal life. Because of him, we have no reason to fear sin or death. We no longer have the need to follow after our own selfish desires. Instead, as we remember that gift, we use our gifts out of love and thanks. We do not strive for our own glory, we strive for the glory of God. We use our gifts to show our gratitude for the greatest gift we have received. Whether it is using them at home, in the work place, or for the church, we do it for the glory of God. We pray we can use these gifts to further spread the news about the gift of Jesus and by doing so further give glory to God. We also pray others use their gifts in the same manner. Let us encourage others to use their gifts for that purpose. But we remember that we cannot do all of this alone. We build up and encourage each other to use our gifts for the right purpose. We pray that God give us the attitude, the ability, and the opportunity to use the gifts he has graciously given us in the right manner, that is to give glory to God.

A young child can very easily get caught up in his own jealousy and be worried about what is his. Any fully-grown person can do so just as easily. Even more so, any person can look at what he already has and be dissatisfied with what he has. We however, view what we have in a different way. We are jealous for our gifts. We recognize that they are special, undeserved gifts from God. We also are jealous to use those gifts for the glory of God.