

Numbers Chapter 20 v 22 - 29

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] chapter 20. We were there a couple of weeks ago and we're going to finish our time in Numbers 20 by reading the final 10 verses or 9 verses. So Numbers and chapter 20 and reading from verse 22 through to the end of the chapter. If you've got one of the church Bibles, that's page 158. And Numbers 20 beginning at verse 22. We've got that subtitle for us there from the translators, the death of Aaron. Verse 22, the whole Israelite community set out from Kadesh came to Mount Hor. At Mount Hor near the border of Edom, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. Call Aaron and his son Eleazar and take them up Mount Hor. Remove Aaron's garments, put them on his son Eleazar.

For Aaron will not, sorry, Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will die there. Moses did as the Lord commanded. They went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community.

Moses removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. When the whole community learned that Aaron had died, all the Israelites mourned for him 30 days. And we'll look at that little passage a bit later and see, we hope, what the Lord has to say to us.

So please have your Bibles open. We won't be spending a great deal of time in Numbers 20. It's a good place for us to begin with. Now as we've been going through Numbers and then previously before that, last year and the year before in Exodus, there's been one main character, as it were, one person who particularly has stood out on that has been, of course, Moses. He has been naturally the one we think of, most of all, associated with God's deliverance of his people from the years of captivity in Egypt. He's been the one, Moses, that we've seen leading and guiding God's people through the desert and bringing them on the way to the promised land. But actually, as we've gone through Exodus and as we've gone through Numbers as well, we've seen that along the way, it's been something of a family affair. Not just Moses, but of course, a couple of weeks ago, we looked at the life of Miriam and her contribution to the work of God as we did a bit of This Is Your Life on the occasion of her death, the beginning of chapter 20. And of course, now we come to Aaron, the brother as well. So Miriam was the older sister, then there was Aaron, and then there was Moses. And each of them had a part to play in this amazing work of God, for God's people. I doubt whether their parents, who we know are called Amram and Jochebed, I doubt if they ever knew or even imagined what the Lord would do through one of them, never mind through the three of them. But that's what God did. Surely there can never be a happier parent than the one whose children love and serve the Lord. Isn't it our desire for each of our children, for all of our children? Some, of course, are blessed to know that and we thank God for them. But how we long and pray for our own children, what a joy it is to see them following Christ and serving him. So what I want to do, because we here in these verses have the death of Aaron recorded, I want us to spend a bit of time considering his life before we turn our attention to the one who is greater, greater than Aaron. And we'll think about him as well. Now, of course, we go back to Exodus in chapter 2. That's the beginning of God's work of deliverance, of rescuing his people. They've been in Egypt, particularly in slavery for 400 years.

It's there in chapter 2 that Miriam and Moses are introduced. So we don't know Miriam's name at that time. We just know she's the older sister who directed Pharaoh's daughter towards the child, Moses in the basket. And they were both children at the time. Moses, just a matter of months old.

[4 : 51] Miriam, we're not sure, but probably no older than 10. But it's not until a lifetime later when Aaron appears on the scene. By this time, he's a man aged 83 years young. And he just comes along in Exodus in chapter 4. While God is speaking to Moses and telling him and instructing him about how he's to return to Egypt and to speak to Pharaoh, Moses gets the jitters and says, I can't

do it. I'm going to freeze up. I've got a stammer. I just can't speak. And the Lord sends to him his brother Aaron. Verse 27 of chapter 4 in Exodus, Lord said to Aaron, go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he sends him to be a helper for Moses, particularly to be his spokesman. And so when you go through the events of the plagues and the meeting with Pharaoh again and again, it's the Lord speaks to Moses and Moses speaks to Aaron. And Aaron is the one who speaks on behalf of Moses. That's what

God had told him in Exodus 4 verse 16. He, Aaron, will speak to the people for you. It will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. That was no easy thing for Aaron to stand before Pharaoh, that hard-hearted king, and to speak to him. And we're told there, your brother is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. And there were times when, of course, Pharaoh got very angry with Moses and Aaron and lost his temper with them because he wanted, of course, his own will and way. And just before the Passover, Pharaoh says to Moses and no doubt Aaron as well, get out of my sight. Make sure you don't appear before me again. The day you see my face, you'll die. So not an easy thing for him to do. And yet, not only did Aaron speak on behalf of Moses, he also performed miracles as well. Some of the plagues were directly on the instruction and the actions of Aaron. In chapter 8 and verse 6, we're told Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frogs came up and covered the land. Later in that same chapter, verse 17, Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground. That came up on people and animals.

In all this, we see how the Lord provided for Moses a helper in the massive task assigned him. That daunting task of leading those two million people out of Egypt. Even Moses, probably the greatest Old Testament leader of God's people, could not perform his ministry alone.

He needed not only the Lord's help, which of course he received, but he also needed a human helper as well. We see something of this wisdom of God, not only here, but of course when we get to the life of Jesus, when he sends out his disciples on two missionary journeys, he sends them into the villages to take the good news and to heal the sick and so on. We find he sends them out in twos, doesn't he? Not on their own. God knows that we need one another. God knows that we need to support one another in whatever service or ministry the Lord has given us. We are not to be islands. We're not to be lone crusaders. We have been put by God into churches. And of course when we get into the rest of the New Testament we see every single part of every church is essential, necessary, needful for the support of one another and others. Sadly, and this has been a predominant view I think certainly in the past few hundred years up until quite recently, there's been the view that a pastor is a lone ranger, that the pastor is the one who is a one-man band. He's the one who is to carry out the responsibility and the work of the church. But if you know anything about the lone ranger you'll know he had tonto and he didn't do it on his own. We need to learn from God's dealings with Moses and Aaron, not to seek to go it alone, not to think that we have all the answers, not to think that we can manage or minister or serve.

I certainly over these last six years have been very, very grateful for the ministry and the help I've received from the elders and from the deacons and from you as church members, not only practically but in your prayers as well. I know that I'm not a lone ranger and I know that God has given you to me and me to you that together we might serve him. We need to be humble and rely upon those the Lord has gifted to us. Now as we go on through the life of Aaron we notice of course that once the Lord led the people out of Egypt, once that ministry of speaking on Moses' behalf to Pharaoh came to an end, God had not finished with Aaron yet. There was a change to take place in his life, a new ministry that God had for him.

[10:12] That phase of his life, that phase of his ministry in serving God as the spokesman was coming to an end and in fact did end really once they entered the wilderness. And we need to recognize as well that in our lives there is a long series of changes that take place and part of the change that takes place in our lives, not just to age but also circumstance and other things as well, well part of that change is the way that God uses us and works through us in his service. And sometimes we can become quite discouraged or even very upset because one door of service has closed. One ministry that we've had perhaps for a very long time within the life of the church has finished. We think perhaps that's us washed up, there's nothing more for us to do but that cannot be the case. We must be very careful that we do not allow a particular ministry or office or whatever it may be to define us. We mustn't allow one particular aspect of serving the Lord to be the only way that we serve the Lord or even the chief reason why we are part of the church. When there comes a

time that we may not be able to preach anymore, that's not the end of God's work for us. Pastors can have that problem when they come to retire. They feel that their ministry and their preaching defines them and without it they're lost.

I hope by God's grace that's not the case should the Lord keep me going. Perhaps we cannot lead a youth club anymore as once we did because of age or whatever it may be or responsibilities and so on.

But there's still a work for us to do that God wants us to do. And it's the same for all ministries or spheres of service. Perhaps you were involved very much in undertaking the painting and decorating, looking after the fabric of the building. Perhaps you were once responsible for the hospitality and the catering within the church. Perhaps you were responsible for visitation. Perhaps you had a ministry as a treasure, looking after the finances. Just because that may come to an end or that's for a season does not mean that God is finished with you or that you have completed all the service that God has for you. Remember when we read through the life of Paul, particularly in Acts, we realized that there was a time when Paul's ministry was chiefly to travel the world as it were, preaching the gospel, planting churches. But then there came a time when he was arrested and imprisoned for a very long time. That ministry of mission and planting was made way for him to write letters to those churches he had planted. Which of those two ministries was the most important?

Which of those two ministries was better than the other? Surely they were both equally important? Surely they were both part of God's purpose for him. And so when we go through the life of Aaron, we realize that though his ministry as the spokesman for Moses was changing, he was given a new sphere of service. And that sphere of service was actually a gift from God to him when he became a priest.

Just a couple of chapters earlier in Numbers in chapter 18 verse 7, this is what the Lord says. He's speaking to Aaron. He says, It's not, but only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain.

[13:57] I am giving you the service of priesthood as a gift. Isn't that amazing? He's giving him this service as a gift.

Sometimes, and we've got to all hold our hands up, we can see the ministry or the opportunity to serve the Lord in whatever sphere it is as a burden. We can see it as something of a duty.

We can see it as something as a difficulty. Say, well, I would rather not be, sorry to pick on you, Martin, I would rather not be looking after the technology when the OHP breaks down.

But it's a gift that God has given to us. Perhaps when one of you who evolved as Lawrence is now the treasurer, having to sort out all the tax, having to sort out all the bills, having to sort out all the finances, it can be, oh, this is doing my head in.

It's a gift that God has given you to serve in that way. And whether that be in playing and piano, whether that be in doing young people's work, mums and toddlers, in all of those things, I believe that just as we read here, I'm giving you the service as a gift.

[15:06] That's how we're to view. Whatever God has given us to do, he wants to give me a gift. And what is a gift? To be received. To receive with thanks.

To receive with joy. And to be enjoyed as well. Yes, Aaron now was to be the high priest within God's tabernacle.

He was given this incredible and wonderful privilege of offering sacrifices to God within the very holy of holies. He was the only one who had this unique access into the presence of the Lord to make atonement for the sins of God's people.

He didn't deserve it. It wasn't because he was worthy of it. Because it was God's gracious gift.

That's very important for me and each one of us to remember. Whatever opportunity we have to serve, it is not because we deserve it.

Not because we're worthy of it. It's God's gift to us. Out of his great and generous grace. And now here we come to Numbers in chapter 20.

[16:15] And that ministry too is coming to an end. That's the whole point of what takes place upon Mount Horeb between Aaron and his son Eleazar. It seems strange to us that Moses is told in verse 26 to remove Aaron's garments and put them on his son.

But remember, these are the high priestly garments. These were the ephod. These were the turban. And this was the various bits and pieces which you can read about elsewhere in Exodus.

That distinguished and symbolized the priesthood that Aaron has. He was now having to pass it on to his own son. He would no longer be that high priest.

He was going to be now gathered to his people. In other words, he was going to die. Aaron's ministry had come to an end. Aaron was a faithful servant of God who perfectly fulfilled God's will. Or was he? Well, we know more about Aaron's life than just that he was the spokesman for Moses and that he was the high priest. With mixed feelings, we have to say that Aaron was a sinful and fallen servant of God.

[17 : 30] We know something of his failures. They're recorded for us. Those are just the public ones. We know, of course, one of the biggest mistakes he made or sins he committed is way back in Exodus 32.

Very soon after coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea at Mount Sinai while Moses was up on the mountaintop receiving God's commandments, his word and his truth, the people approached Aaron and they said to him, make us gods, idols.

That's exactly what he did. Tells them to give them some of their gold and he puts it in a melting pot and he produces this golden cup. What could have possessed Aaron to have done that?

Why on earth would he commit such an act of idolatry before the Lord? Is it possible that the people coming to him instead of Moses may have inflated his pride, may have massaged his ego?

Is it possible that his position as Moses' right-hand man in that sense and co-leader went to his head? Whatever the reason, we don't know that the great tragedy befalls the whole of God's people as over 3,000 die because of this man's weakness for power and the praise of people.

[19 : 04] How sad it is that many Christians since Aaron's day have brought death to the church by their desire for power, their desire for honor, for allowing themselves to think too highly of their position and ministry.

tragically, of course, we know that nearly 40 years later, Aaron again finds pride filling his heart and his mind as we looked just a few weeks ago in Numbers 12.

He and Miriam seek to overthrow God's appointed and chosen leader, Moses. Numbers 12, verse 1, Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses.

Has the Lord spoken only through Moses, they asked. Hasn't he also spoken through us? That position, that privilege, that gift of ministry given to Aaron became a snare for him, became arrogant, became conceited, thought that he himself should also receive the honor, as he saw it, of Moses.

Then again, even here in chapter 20, just the precursor to his own death, we find that both he and Moses once more fail in their position as God's leaders.

[20 : 32] Was it the influence of Aaron upon Moses that led him into this one and only failing that we can find in his life of God's service? But again, we're told of Aaron's failing to obey the Lord's command and to honor him as holy in the sight of the people.

So Aaron's life was a checkered life, one of great and incredible privilege and blessing, one marred, sadly, by serious failings.

But I don't want to spend all the time thinking about Aaron and his failures. Instead, I want us to spend just the time we have left thinking about not the first priest of God, but the greatest and last priest of God.

Would you turn with me just for a moment then over to Hebrews and to chapter 7? Hebrews and chapter 7. Again, if you have one of the church Bibles in your hands then you can find that on page 1206.

Page 1206 because here in this part of Hebrews there's quite a large section devoted to comparing the priesthood of Aaron and his sons and that of the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 55] I want to just pick up on a couple of things here, particularly to do with death. So verse 23 of Hebrews chapter 7. Now there have been many of those priests, that's the Levitical priests, the priests that were descendants of Aaron, since death prevented them from continuing in office.

But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save, and I prefer the AV, to the uttermost, just because it's a great word, but completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins, once for all, when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness, but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the son, who has been made perfect forever.

[23 : 20] There's two things here, I think, that we can see. The writer of the Hebrews highlights in comparison between Jesus, the great priest, and Aaron, and the first priest.

First of all, in keeping with our passage, we see that Aaron, like all the other priests, died, but Jesus lives forever. There's a comparison, isn't it?

Death prevented them from continuing in office, but Jesus lives forever. As I said, Aaron's ministry comes to an end at the end of chapter 20 in Numbers.

His work of offering sacrifices to take away the people's sins is over. Another, he's made his last offering. He can never again obtain forgiveness for the sins of the people.

Another has to take his place, until he dies, and then another after him, and so on, and so on, and so on. The very forgiveness of God's people is dependent upon there being another priest to take the place of the one who's died.

[24 : 26] died. But the writer says here that Jesus, our great high priest, has a permanent priesthood. He never dies, and therefore our eternal forgiveness is guaranteed and certain.

Therefore, he says, he's able to save completely. Because Jesus never dies, our salvation can never be lost. The forgiveness of sins does not have to be repeated.

It's been done once and for all and forever, and he saves us eternally. It's your confidence in Jesus, the great high priest.

It's your confidence in what he does. You see, the emphasis upon Jesus living and saving completely. If Jesus had died upon the cross and remained in the tomb, then our salvation would have no certainty.

It would have died with him. Just as the priesthood in one sense died with each priest. But Jesus lives forever. Our great high priest.

[25 : 34] Therefore, he always lives to intercede. Dear friends, we continue to sin. Just like the people of God of old. We continue to need forgiveness, just as they did. But what Jesus has done for us in the fact that he lives for us is this.

He's provided everlasting, undying forgiveness. forgiveness. The second thing that we read here as well, and we've mentioned it and thought about it with Aaron is this, that like Aaron and all the priests that came after him, they were sinful and unholy, but Jesus was sinless and holy.

Verse 26, such a high priest truly meets our need. This is Jesus, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens, unlike the other high priests.

How was he different? The other high priests, when they came into the presence of God and brought that offering on the day of atonement, they were making an offering not only for the sins of the people, but for their own sins.

Like we saw with Aaron's life, he was a failing and faulty and sinful man. He kept on falling. He was unfit to serve God, unfit to save anybody, even himself.

[26 : 58] But the writer says this, that with Jesus we have one who truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, and pure.

Why is that important? Why is it important that Jesus, our high priest, was without sin? Well, it's certainly important that he kept God's commandments. that's a separate thing in one sense as our priest.

He kept all the commandments of God and as our substitute he fulfilled all of God's commandments and law so that we are righteous in God's sight when we are in Christ.

His perfection, as it were, his sinlessness covers over our lack and our failing to keep God's law.

But in this place particularly the writer is considering the sacrifice that Jesus brought as the high priest.

it means that there's nothing to prevent God from receiving him and the offering that he brings for our sin.

[27 : 58] Sin separates men and women from God. Sin takes everything that we do, even our worship of God. Sin makes it impossible for us to offer recompense for our sin if we could.

You see, because every good deed we do, even our most righteous actions are still tainted by sin. They are unacceptable to God because he is holy.

So even if we lived a thousand million lifetimes and did everything as best we could, because we are sinful, then our offerings are sinful. But Jesus had no sin.

And so all that he offers on our behalf is holy and effective to provide atonement for us. That's why he goes on to say such a high priest truly meets our need.

And later on, in verse 27, he sacrificed for their sins, that's ours, once for all, when he offered himself. He is the sinless sacrificer, as well as the sinless sacrifice itself.

[29 : 17] In Numbers in chapter 20, at the end of that chapter, the community of God's people weep. They mourn because their great high priest is dead and is no more.

Dear friends, and it's fitting that we're here at the Lord's table, we remember and rejoice in the death of our great high priest, because by it we have become priests of God.

Priests who now have this liberty to enter into the holy presence of God with everlasting joy and thanksgiving. And so I repeat what we read at the very start of our service.

Therefore, because of what Jesus has done as our great high priest, because of the sacrifice he has made, because of his endless life and his holy perfection, therefore, brothers and sisters, we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance, the assurance of what?

[30 : 35] That we are forgiven and accepted, that we are right with God through faith. Let's sing together as we prepare our hearts and our lives to come and remember to take part in the Lord's Supper.

Now, I'm going to sing number 240. It's probably not a hymn that you recognize, but you will recognize the tune that Kath's chosen for us, and I've picked it particularly because of the words, which are full of the truths, I hope, of what we've been thinking even this evening.

240, great high priest, we view thee stooping. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240.

240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240. 240.