

<sup>1</sup> *Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.* <sup>2</sup> *“Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the LORD heard this.*

<sup>3</sup> *(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)*

<sup>4</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> *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,* <sup>6</sup> *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.*

<sup>7</sup> *But this is not true of my servant Moses;  
he is faithful in all my house.*

<sup>8</sup> *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?”*

<sup>9</sup> *The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.*

<sup>10</sup> *When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy;* <sup>11</sup> *and he said to Moses, “Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed.* <sup>12</sup> *Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother’s womb with its flesh half eaten away.”*

<sup>13</sup> *So Moses cried out to the LORD, “O God, please heal her!”*

<sup>14</sup> *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.”* <sup>15</sup> *So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.*

(NIV84)

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## BE IMITATORS OF CHRIST

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!” The highest compliment that you can pay a person is attempting to be like them. Just watch a child, pushing his plastic bubble mower across the lawn to be just like dad. Just look at the daughter that turns anything into a phone to hold up to the side of her face just like mom does.

Maybe some of you have children that have followed in your footsteps, into the military or into the medical profession. It’s a proud moment for mom and dad when your child decides they want to do the same job as they do.

Do you remember the first time you realized that were becoming your parents? I remember the first time I put something important in a “safe place” and then couldn’t remember where the safe place was. I remember unpacking my bag from the clothing store and then realizing I bought the same shirt in 2 different sizes, knowing that I could take the one that doesn’t fit back. I’m turning into my mom. From time to time I catch myself washing out ziplock bags or driving across town to the other grocery store because milk is on sale over there. I’m more of my dad than I’d like to admit as well. I’m

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turning into my parents, but you know what that's OK. My parents were really good people and did a great job of raising their 4 kids. I could be turning into worse people than them. I guess imitating them is an alright thing.

Today's lesson tells about some sibling rivalry that took place in Moses' family. While it wasn't the brightest day for that group of three, it is an opportunity for us to learn a thing or two about forgiveness, love, and humility. We'll see how Moses really handled that difficult situation well. Even though he was being rejected and rebelled against, we'll see how he was a good leader and a great sibling. Today it's my prayer that we can all be like Moses, that the difficult situations in our lives will be handled with the class, dignity, humility and love that Moses displayed. We can't do that on our own, but with the Spirit living in us and with his power and love coursing our veins, just like Moses, we can **Be Imitators of Christ**.

Moses was used to fielding complaints. He was not too far into his stint as the leader of God's people. The story in our text today takes place between Mt. Sinai and the spies going into the land of Canaan. They had not been on their journey for long, but the complaint box was starting to get full. The people were upset with leaving their homes behind in Egypt. They forgot pretty quickly the cruel oppression, but I guess the grass is always greener on the other side of the Red Sea, right? (Is that how the saying goes?) They were hungry, and God gave them manna. Then, like my 6 year old, they were hungry for something else, and God gave them quail. Moses was growing accustomed to the complaining, but I bet it was still a blind side hit when the complaints came from his brother and sister. <sup>1</sup> *Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.* <sup>2</sup> *"Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?"*

Hollywood has power couples! Moses was a member of the first power family. Moses was the God appointed leader of the people. His brother Aaron, was the High Priest of all Israel, their spiritual leader and the one that would offer sacrifices and proclaim God's forgiveness to the people. Even Miriam had some power. She was a prophetess. She led the women of Israel to worship God and led them in singing and dancing after the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. They were all three given gifts to lead and blessed with people who were faithfully following, but that wasn't enough for Miriam and Aaron.

The debate begins with some questions about Moses' wife, but quickly that façade melts to expose the real reason for the discontent. <sup>2</sup> *"Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?"* They were jealous of Moses' position, jealous that God spoke to him and not to them.

It's really easy for us to read of the sin of the people from the Bible and act as if we'd do so much better and as if those sins are so far beneath us, but in reality, this story could just as easily have your name or mine attached, could it not? We rebel against authority all the time, don't we? Maybe it's having a sour attitude and speaking unkind words about our elected officials. Maybe is malcontent for the leaders in the church, wishing they'd take the easy path instead of leading in the way that God would have them lead. Maybe it's jealousy toward our brothers or sisters – be those literal siblings or maybe our brothers and sisters in Christ. Any time that I am less than content with the gifts that God has given me, I'm really accusing him of error. When I feel that it's not fair that so-and-so has the well-paying job and well-behaved kids and the well-polished life. Maybe we feel like our faithfulness should be rewarded with an easier life, and someone else's casually Christian life ought to have some rocks on the path. Ladies, maybe from time to time you get jealous of your husband's God given

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authority because you feel like he's not leading the way he should be and not loving you the way he ought. Guys, maybe you don't take your headship seriously and would rather follow than lead. We show in the ugly words that we say and the even uglier thoughts that linger in our heads just how far from contentment we really are. We know clearly God's way, but we think we have a way that is better so we rebel. **Be an Imitator of Christ** is the command and how do we do? Does your Facebook wall look the way that Jesus' would? Is it always respectful, loving, charitable words that you share or is it disdain for government, anger toward individuals and pride packed words that you share?

When we imitate the devil's ways instead of Christ's ways, we deserve the same fate as Miriam. ***The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy;*** We deserve to have God leave us alone in our sinful discontent. Because of our pride, we deserve to be left to fend for ourselves. We deserve to have God storm off from us and in anger leave us to deal with the consequences of our sin. Leprosy was a death sentence. It would infect and destroy more and more skin until the body could no longer function. You'd lose appendages and then limbs and then life. Our sin is a death sentence too. We lose comfort and then peace and then life. Sin would slowly eat away at us, until it took our lives. Without an intercessor, we'd die in our sins. Without someone to fix our problem, we'd live and then die separated from God and stuck in his wrath.

But he healed us! Jesus Christ has healed us! Like he did for those lepers of long ago, he does for us. He healed us from our disease by applying the most potent medication this world has ever seen – the perfect and holy blood of God. ***He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness...and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*** (1 John 1:7,9).

It's amazing to think that Jesus has healed us of our jealousy and pride and sin by being the opposite. He was always humble, always content, always perfectly obedient. He was what we could never be. He was spotless yet willing to be covered by our faults and failures. He was holy, yet was willing to give up his holy blood to pay our redemption price. He was willing to die so that we could be made pure and holy and be washed clean like him.

Though Moses didn't know his name, he was an **Imitator of Christ**. Not a shred of delight in the accuser being brought down a notch or two. Not an inkling of "Take that!" or "Serves you right!" All that Moses felt was humble compassion. All that Moses had was a desire that Miriam be healed. <sup>13</sup> ***So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!"***

All that Jesus had for us was a desire that we be healed. That's why he suffered, that's why he died. Not an inkling of "Told you so!" No hint of "Serves you right!" from Jesus. Though our sins caused his death, he doesn't delight in our pain, or secretly relish our struggles. All that Jesus has is a desire that we are healed, cleansed, forgiven.

And that is the attitude that we can have about others. The love that Jesus has given us, we can seek the share. The attitude that he had over us is an attitude that we can have about others. ***Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*** (Ephesians 5:1-2).

When temptations toward jealousy or pride come our way, remember the humble attitude of Christ, remember the humility that he displayed for you and your salvation. Resist that temptation with the blood of Christ and power of his love. Instead of following where our sinful nature wants to lead,

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instead of being what the world wants and is, **Be an Imitator of Christ.** Follow his lead and example. Rejoice in the love that he showed for you and seek to humbly serve others with his love.

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!” Flatter and worship and praise our God as we seek to live our lives like him. Follow in his footsteps to show mercy and kindness and compassion every day. Reflect Christ-like love to those you meet and they and you will be blessed. Care for those around you – body and soul. Be humble. Be a servant. Show them Christ. And if the Holy Spirit blesses your work, they might just join you, imitating Christ, sharing his love, glorifying his name. It’s a precious privilege to follow in our Father’s footsteps till we rest in his proud and warm embrace in the mansion of heavenly glory, washed, purified, glorified!! An eternity in the presence of Jesus – the best reward of all! And it’s our free gift from Jesus, because ours is a God of love  
!! Amen.