

## Numbers 14:1-20

### The Reasons God Continues to Pardon

*Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now – v. 19*

Pray for me – How often have you requested that of another Christian? Pray for me – I'm facing an important decision – Pray for me – I'm confronted with a distressing trial – Pray for me – that I'll persevere in my walk with the Lord.

We all make that kind of request or at least we should. The apostle Paul himself made that request in a number of his epistles. *Brethren pray for us* he writes to the Thessalonians without even telling them anything in particular to pray about. He simply wants their prayers because he knew how dependent he was on God when it came to doing anything for God and therefore he sensed a constant need to have others pray for him.

All too often we assure someone that we will pray for them when they make that kind of request but we don't. And it's not that we're unwilling to or that we just flagrantly lied when we said we would pray for them, what happens is that we forget. I wonder this morning who you would choose to have pray for you if you could have any character in the Bible pray for you? The apostle Paul would be a good choice. He prayed for all to whom he ministered. He took them to heart. He bore their burdens and he was faithful in that ministry.

Another very good choice would be Moses. I think I'd want Moses to pray for me. When I look at Moses and see how much he was able to gain for the children of Israel in spite of what they deserved he strikes me as a pretty good intercessor. We see that in the portion of Scripture we've read from Numbers 14. Look at vv. 19,20 again: *Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word.*

This was not the first time that Moses obtained this kind of blessing for the people for whom he prayed. We looked last week at Exod. 33 and we noted in that chapter how Moses interceded for the people and was able to gain the promise from the Lord that he would give the Israelites the land and that he would drive their enemies out before them but the Lord also said that he would not go with them because they were a stubborn and stiff-necked people but before Moses was through with his intercession he also gained the promise of the Lord's presence.

And Moses intercession was always timely. The Lord would say to Moses more than once the words we have in v. 12 *I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.* And Moses would then intercede and his intercession would prevail to keep the Lord from destroying the people.

How did Moses manage to prevail time and time again to obtain pardon for the Israelites? The answer to this question is that Moses knew just what to plead before God in

order to gain and gain again the pardon of God. By examining Moses' constant plea for the Israelites' pardon we are able to see beyond Moses to an even greater intercessor – even Christ himself. And we're able to understand why it is that God continues to pardon his people. Isn't that a tremendous truth to consider – that God continues to pardon his people. I love the refrain to that hymn that ends with the words *He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

Did you ever ask yourself why that is the case? Why does God continue to give? How is it that he keeps on pardoning? And how can we know that he'll continue to keep on pardoning? That's what I'd like you to think upon this morning in preparation for our time around the Lord's table.

## Why Does God Keep on Pardoning His People?

The reasons can be found in Moses' intercession. And so consider with me first of all that God continues to pardon his people:

### I. Because the Basis for Pardon Never Changes

Note again the words of our text in v. 19 *Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy,* and now note this last phrase especially: *and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.*

Do you understand the argument that Moses is making here? He's saying in effect – *Lord you've already pardoned a lot of sin.* From the time we were in Egypt you pardoned sin. When the people refused to accept deliverance but instead became more angry with me because Pharaoh made their lives hard you pardoned sin. When they accused me of bringing them out of Egypt to be slain by an oncoming Egyptian army you pardoned sin and opened the Red Sea and saw us safely through while at the same time destroying the Egyptian Army.

And when the people grumbled because they didn't have water, you pardoned and provided. And when I was in the mount and the people below were engaged in lewd idolatry going so far as to make a golden calf, still, you pardoned sin. And now, *Lord as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now, pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy.*

Now you might think on the surface of this matter that with all the sin that the Lord had pardoned, he might be weary of pardoning sin. I believe, however, that Moses knew very well that there was a just basis for God to pardon sin in the first place. And so the question then becomes not why does God keep on pardoning sin but rather – why has God ever pardoned sin in the first place?

The Apostle Paul states it very plainly in the conclusion of his sermon that he preached at Antioch of Pisidia. What a powerful conclusion to a message when we find Paul proclaiming in Acts 13:38 where he says in conclusion: *Be it known unto you therefore,*

*men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* “Through this man” – he says, the reference being to Christ, the One who saw no corruption in the grave, the one that God raised from the dead, the previous verse in Acts 13 says. *Through this man is preached* – and don’t you love it that this subject is preached which means that it is dogmatically proclaimed as a matter of certain truth. It’s not a matter of speculation or some form of philosophical sophistry that leaves the matter questionable – *through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* This is why God has forgiven sins and it’s why God will continue to forgive sins – because forgiveness of sins has been and always will be through this man, Christ Jesus.

I believe Moses was aware of this and that this truth of there being a just basis for sins to be forgiven is really what he’s pleading before God when he reminds God that he has pardoned the Israelites from Egypt up until that that very moment. This becomes even clearer in the previous verse where Moses is recalling that time he spent in the mount when the Lord showed him his glory. He is pleading that word or I should say that name of God that the Lord proclaimed to him. Look at vv. 17,18 *And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.*

That word *clearing* in the phrase *not clearing the guilty* is a word that is sometimes translated *unpunished*. In other words God forgives iniquity and transgression but doesn’t by any means simply let sin go unpunished. There has to be a just basis for forgiveness. There has to be satisfaction to the broken law of God. And the good news of the gospel is that God has punished Christ. And so we find Moses pleading for forgiveness on the basis of the very character or the very name of God. It’s no wonder his plea with God prevailed.

Now the devil’s design has ever been to convince you that God will not pardon your sins. He’s the one that will try to convince you that God grows weary of being taken advantage of. His subtle whisper in your ear will be that God expects more in return than what you’ve given him.

This is what makes the communion table so important. The bread and the cup say to us *through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* Through the broken body and shed blood of Christ God is just and the justifier of those that believe in Jesus. And one of the things that makes this communion table such a blessing is that it never changes because the grounds for your forgiveness never changes.

So long as the grounds for your forgiveness is found in the broken body and shed blood of Christ then you can be assured that just as God has, spiritually speaking, pardoned your sins from the time of Egypt even until now, so will God continue to do as he has done. Why does God continue to pardon sins? Because the basis for forgiveness never changes – that basis being the very character of God.

But would you consider with me next that God continues to pardon sin:

## II. Because God is Concerned for His own Glory

Look at the word that God gives to Moses in vv. 11,12 *And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.*

Now notice how Moses responds to this word not with any reference to the Israelites. He's not going to say to God: please pardon this people, Lord, because even though they've sinned, there's some good in them too. Even though they've sinned they have some good qualities in them also. They did, after all, apply the blood of the Passover lamb to their doorposts. They did, after all, leave Egypt. They did cross the Red Sea between the parted waters. They did pledge that they would obey when you manifested yourself on Mt. Sinai and gave them the 10 commandments.

Moses makes no reference to anything that he might hope would be acceptable to God. He instead makes reference to the glory of God. In particular he appeals to the reputation of God. Notice this in vv. 13-16, this is large portion of Moses plea **{Num. 14:13-16}**.

Do you see what the primary concern is for Moses? He's concerned for God's fame or for God's reputation. He's not taken up with the awful dread or the tragedy of God in his sovereign power eliminating a generation of Israelites. God couldn't be blamed for that. Those Israelites deserved no better than that. But Moses is jealous for God's honor – Moses is concerned that God not be viewed as One who would be unable to finish something he started.

And here once again, therefore, we are able to see why Moses plea was a prevailing plea. His plea prevailed because the thing that concerns God most is his own glory. Everything is for God's glory. Creation is for the glory of God – the providence of God is for the glory of God. Redemption is for the glory of God. The decrees of God are for the glory of God. I like the way this is stated in our shorter catechism – Q7 What are the decrees of God? *The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.*

The strongest basis of assurance you can gain from God comes through your understanding of the truth that God does everything for his own glory. This truth that God does everything for his own glory is brought out again and again throughout the Scriptures by that familiar phrase *for his name's sake*. If you want to conduct a good and edifying Bible study some time as a family trace that phrase *for his name's sake* through the Bible and take note of all that God does for his name's sake. Let me give you a sampling:

- Ps 23:3 *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
- Ps 25:11 *For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it [is] great.*
- Ps 79:9 *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.*

- Ps 143:11 *Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.*

These are a few of the references; there are many more. Look them up and rehearse them together in your family Bible study sometime. The point that these verses preach is that God does what he does for his glory. That's a study in itself that perhaps we'll take up again.

Before leaving this point there is one other matter that we must consider that is of a serious and solemn nature. Notice again the words of vv. 20,21 – these are the words of God in response to Moses plea: *And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word: But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.*

If you know this chapter in Numbers then you know that this is the chapter in which God says to the Israelites that they would not enter the promised land. They would instead spend 40 years in the wilderness during which a generation of grumblers and complainers and doubters would die in the wilderness and then their children would enter the promised land and would conquer and possess it.

One might well reason – *but I thought they were pardoned.* I thought God responded to Moses plea and forgave their sin. And indeed God did pardon their sin. If God says *I have pardoned according to thy word* then you can take it as absolute truth that God did pardon them.

But the thing you have to remember in order to bring what might appear on the surface to be contradictory actions by God when he says he pardons but then he also says they will not enter the promised land – the thing you have to remember, once again, is the point I've been putting before you which is that God does all things for his glory – *as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.*

And it is in keeping with his glory that the Israelites would be pardoned and would also be chastised. Moses was right, you see, in pleading that God's reputation was at stake and that the heathen would have cause to denigrate God if God simply judged that generation of Israelites. But on the other hand God's glory would not be promoted either by continual disregard on his part for unbelief. *How long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?* – God asks Moses in v. 11.

If ever there was a lesson for the people of God to take to heart today it would be the lesson that unbelief calls for chastisement – unbelief does not promote the glory of God – unbelief must be dealt with and must be overcome. Now in this gospel dispensation we are given the opportunity to chastise ourselves.

The Christians at Corinth you might recall were being chastised by God and they were being chastised severely. *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep* Paul writes in 1Cor. 11:30. The reason for sickness and death pertained to the irreverent manner in which they were observing the Lord's table. This is why I point out each month that this ordinance is a serious and solemn ordinance. But in the next verse

after Paul speaks of those that are weak and sickly many of whom slept Paul then says in v. 31 *if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* And then there follows this word of explanation in v. 32 *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*

Here is the opportunity we have then to promote the Lord's glory and be spared of the Lord's chastisement – we must judge ourselves. We could spend some time on dealing with such a matter in terms of how deeply such a judgment should be applied to ourselves by ourselves. You get some idea of the fervency that ought to be exercised in self-judgment by Christ's words in Mt. 5:29,30 *if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

I don't believe Christ is calling for literal self-mutilation but he is calling for self-judgment to be exercised with intensity. The way we exercise that self-judgment around the Lord's table is through the confession of our sins. And by confession I'm not simply saying that you acknowledge your sins; I'm saying rather that you preach to yourself and condemn your own sins and then you plead the blood of Christ over your own sins. And in so doing you will escape abusing grace and you'll escape marring God's glory and will instead promote that glory.

Why does the Lord continue to pardon, then? He continues to pardon because there is an unchanging basis for pardon; and he continues to pardon because he's interested in promoting his glory. Let's note finally that God continues to pardon:

### III. Because the Right Man Pleads for Us

Moses certainly was an effective intercessor for the Israelites. This becomes readily apparent by the Lord's answer to his plea in v. 20 *And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word.*

I asked the question in my introduction about who you would want to pray for you and I said I would want Moses praying for me because of his record of successful intercession. Some of you probably answered that question mentally by saying *I would want Christ to pray for me.* I didn't include Christ in the point I was making because Christ indeed does pray for you.

The thing I want you to see just now is that just as Moses was the right man to intercede for Israel in Num. 14, Christ is the right man to have interceding for us in heaven right now. I think it would be true to say that Moses points us to Christ in his intercession. For Christ certainly pleads for the glory of God and Christ certainly pleads on the basis of the character of God especially the faithfulness of God to his own character.

But there's also the truth that Christ is superior to Moses in the matter of intercession. We did a study a couple years ago on the superiority of Christ to Moses when we studied

the epistle to the Hebrews. I noted in that study that Christ is superior to Moses in his prophetic ministry and that even though Aaron was to serve as a priest, Moses, nevertheless, served a priestly function in interceding for Israel but Christ is superior to Moses even in that. And Christ is superior to Moses in his pastoral care for his people.

Some of you may recall the petition of Moses in the mount following the idolatry of the Israelites – how Moses was so burdened that he would say to God in Ex 32:32 *Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.*

This is the same heart burden that Paul himself would express in Rom. 9:3 where he writes *For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

And it is precisely here that we may see the superior faithfulness of Christ in His ministry of intercession. Paul could wish himself accursed from Christ and Moses may request to be blotted out of God's book but only Christ could actually be accursed and only Christ could actually die in the place of those that deserved to be accursed. So we're told in Gal. 3:13 *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree.*

How can we be confident, then, that God will continue to pardon us? The basis for pardon never changes – God is concerned first and foremost for his glory – and we have the right man interceding for us.

May we approach the Lord's table, then, in the assurance that just as God has pardoned he will pardon. And may we indeed – as the hymn says *In wonder lost, with trembling joy, We take the pardon of our God: Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, A pardon bought with Jesus blood.*