

Numbers (Part Three): Poised At The Jordan

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I am sure that every one of us has had a day, or an event, that we have anticipated for weeks or months or years of our lives. For some, it might be passing one of those age things, like when you get your license (Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to have the freedom to be able to get in a car and roar down the highway!).

Or maybe it is graduating from school—high school or college—and getting out into the work world. Getting married is a big event that a lot of us look forward to. Some people get cold feet, but otherwise they are looking forward to their wedding and getting married. And then, of course, there is anticipating a child after that marriage, or maybe, later on in life, it is just not children we are looking forward to, it is grandchildren that we are looking forward to (I am actually in that boat myself right now, but there is no pressure. I can wait till the right time). That is kind of what this sermon is all about.

For those things like getting a promotion, buying a house, you name it, there are many life events that we get excited about and anticipate greatly. We cannot wait for them to arrive. But we have to wait, do we not?

What do we do between the time that we begin anticipating the big event and the big event itself? Like I said, sometimes it is months or years between the time you know you are going to do something, or something is going to come down the pipe, and the time you actually get to enjoy it. Mostly we wait. That is all we do. We wait for that time. We live our lives one day a time, walk one step in front of the other with an occasional stumble or two, but we are still moving forward toward that goal inch by inch.

Sometimes, especially as the day gets closer, if it is only weeks or months away, we can start to make plans. We can start putting things down and getting things together and making sure everything comes off just the way it is supposed to. We can let others know about our big day and invite them to enjoy it with us.

And, of course, especially as it draws very close, we get ourselves ready for that day. Not just the other preparations, but we get ourselves, our minds, and everything ready for that time so we can enjoy it the most. What else is there to do? We cannot jump forward in time. There is no way we can get in a DeLorean and go 80 miles an hour or whatever it was, and hit that perfect spot and jump forward in time. We simply wait. We have to endure the time between learning of this thing and receiving it.

That is a prominent factor in the last 11 chapters of the book of Numbers: Waiting. Those people got to the plains of Moab and they camped and they waited—waited for the command to cross the Jordan. There was nothing else to do.

Remember, the Israelites had their problems all through the desert and they had died, as the last sermon showed, all through those 40 years (38 years from Kadesh where they had rebelled). So by the time they got to the plains of Moab, they were just about all dead. Then, suddenly, the Moabites

and the Midianites entice the Israelites to their idolatry and their fornication with their God, Baal of Peor, and the last of the bad guys—the original generation—died. Let us see this in Numbers 26. After he has numbered them, they have come up to 601,730. Says verse 63:

Numbers 26:63-65 These are those who were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they numbered the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them, “They shall surely die in the wilderness.” So there was not left a man of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

As they stood poised to cross into the Promised Land, God ordered Moses to take a second census and all the original Israelites, the original slave generation, had died as a result of their sins and rebellion against God. Every single one of them was dead. They made sure of that.

When they had made this census, I am sure there was more to it than just numbers. They did like we do where they take names and they figure out how many are in each household and they get various other information. We do not have that here. But they must have known because the names of those other ones that they had gotten thirty-eight or forty years before were no longer on the list—they had died. But their descendants had grown into an equally large group and they were there, camped on the plains of Moab just across the Jordan River from Jericho. They could see it. It was right there just beyond their grasp.

From chapter 27 on, Moses gives them instructions (a little bit here, a little bit there about this and that). But mostly what they did was just wait. They waited. They lived each day as it came and then watched it pass and then anticipated the next day. Because they never knew quite when they would get the instruction to move forward.

Does life feel that way to you right now? Are you living that kind of life where you feel poised on the edge of something but all you can do is wait? Do you feel like you are in a perpetual holding pattern, like you are just buzzing around like an airplane over a city—you cannot quite land yet, you cannot come down?

If we do, if we feel that way—we feel like we are just waiting and just biding our time—we can either grouse with impatience, or anger, or we can be patient, we can endure, and we can busy ourselves with preparation to make sure that our landing (in this metaphor) is safe and secure. Now that, of course, is what God wants us to do—the latter bit. He wants us to be patient, to endure to the end, and to prepare and to get ready for Jesus Christ’s return.

In this part of Numbers, as we go through these final 11 chapters, we see a people on the verge of the Promised Land experiencing something analogous to what we are going through in our lives. It is not a perfect parallel. They were a physical people. They had to walk across the desert to get to this point, and they are going to have to walk through the Jordan and then conquer the land themselves. So it is not a perfect parallel.

But we are going to see that the things that they were doing are very like us waiting for the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. So we are going to take a bit of a survey of this section—these 11 chapters. We will hop, skip, and jump through these final chapters of

Numbers and see what applies to us, see what we can extract from it that might be helpful, to give us some understanding of how relevant the last chapters of Numbers are to the Feast of Tabernacles and the idea of pilgrimage, and the Kingdom of God to come at the end of it. Not only that, but we will see that there are even some parallels that may be a bit more far reaching, that these things can apply not just to us now but to those in the Millennium and those in the Great White Throne judgment.

If we were to take the time to flip through these last few chapters (maybe some of you have gone over them in the last few days, just looking at it), we would see that it does not look promising for a sermon. There does not seem to be a whole lot there. I will have to admit before you all (this is the truth) this is the hardest sermon I have ever prepared in my life, because I felt that the material was so difficult and I was having a very hard time getting my mind around the parallels and it actually stressed me out quite a bit.

So if you looked at it and thought that this section was pretty dry and did not seem like there was a whole lot that was actually applicable to us, then you will know that I felt the same exact way, that I was having a hard time pulling things out of it (not for lack of inspiration from God; just lack of stuff between my ears, I think; just an inability to see the connections).

But, like I said, if we flip through these chapters, we see that pretty much nothing happens. It is static. They are static. They are camped. They are sitting in their tents. Every once in a while, they will listen to Moses. They do not do a whole lot. There is not much to get a grip around.

Only chapter 31 contains any action whatsoever, and that is when the Israelites are told by God “Go out and kill some Midianites for what they did to you with the Moabites when they enticed you to sin.” “Get your revenge on them,” He said. And so they do. But it is a pretty quick and swift victory, and then they go back to sitting in their tents after they divide the plunder. That is always nice.

But there is really not a whole lot going on. That is it. The rest is census, inheritance laws, offerings, vows, a review of Israel’s journey and all the places they stopped along the way, the boundaries of the land, Levitical cities, cities of refuge, and a couple of judgments. That is it. Eleven chapters of pretty dry stuff.

Now do you get the sense (you should, after I have said this fifteen times) that not much happened in those months? They just spent their time on workaday activities, their normal routines, whatever it was that they had done. I get the impression that they were just there. It was boring. There was nothing to do. It was just life. And, as we saw last time, people were not dying anymore. So even the burial crews were leaning on their shovels with nothing to do. They probably enjoyed the rest. But it is a very dry, non-eventful section of Scripture.

But there *is* stuff there. Of course, this particular point that there was nothing that seemed to be going on, applies to us. It sounds familiar to us. John Reid asks me every time he talks to me, “Do you think Christ is going to come soon? Do you have any ideas about when He will come?” And we say, “No, John. Nothing since yesterday. We will just wait. We will wait and see.” But that is essentially what we are dealing with here. This is a lesson for us.

The Christian life is not going to be one of big miracles happening all the time. We are going to have to live each day. We are going to have to take one step at a time. As I mentioned in a previous

sermon, Leroy Neff said “It is the plodders that will take the Kingdom of God.” Those are the ones that put one foot ahead of the others that will be there. Those are the ones that have learned to endure and just take life as it comes and make the right decisions and just keep on keeping on.

Now it is true our lives, our preparation is rather mundane. It is routine. You know, when God calls us, He does not say, “Okay, I’ve called you to go out on a legendary quest. I want you to throw the ring of fire into Mount Doom.” That is not what He has asked us to do. He does not say that you have to journey into the heart of the evil lord’s domain to slay him with the sword of truth. That is not what He has called us to. We are not required to be heroes. We are not required to be warriors in any physical sense, leaders of nations. We are not even required to be any kind of guru whose wisdom turns the tide of the battle with evil.

Really, it is just the opposite. He calls us to follow Him and He calls us to be children—children of God, children who follow their parents. He wants us to be humble. He wants us to be meek. He wants us to be teachable. He wants us to be leadable. Not to have trumpets blown every time we walk into a room. Not to go out there and slay the dragon (it has already been done, essentially). He wants us just to pick up where we are and follow Him like a child.

Let us go to I Peter 1 and just see how Peter shows this. We usually come to this because we want to get to the point where it says “You shall be holy because I am holy.” But there is another small part in this that I want to pick out. So he says (as you are going through your walk here):

I Peter 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So we are hoping for His return, His revelation to whole world, and we are supposed to set our hope on that fully. We are always looking toward that. We are always hoping, like John Reid, that it will come very soon.

Now look at this first phrase.

I Peter 1:14-16 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

But the attitude that we have to take, the mindset that we have to move forward with is that we are obedient children. Have you ever watched truly well-behaved children with their parents? Going on an activity with their folks, these well-behaved children follow behind like little ducks, or they hold their parents’ hands and they go. They do not run off somewhere. They do not get the “Squirrel!” and they are off like a dog. They stay there with their parents and they do what their parents say. When their parents are engaged with others, talking or whatever or conducting a transaction, they just wait there patiently until their parents are willing to go on to whatever the next thing. And if the parents are busy for a longer time, then the parents tell the kids “Okay, do this. Color your coloring book” (or whatever). And they do. They remain occupied in that activity as long as it takes, until the parents take them somewhere else. If these obedient children have a question, they ask politely—and they listen intently to the answer.

And that is what we have been called to do: Obedient children whose conduct is holy, like God’s is holy. And when He goes, we follow behind Him or we hold His hand. When He stops and conducts

some business, we wait patiently until He is done. And then when He moves on, we move on with Him. If we have to remain occupied in an activity for a longer period, we do not get up and run wild just because it seems like He is not paying attention to us for a time—No. We wait patiently until He tells us to move forward. If we have a question, we ask politely in prayer and then we begin to listen for an answer, and we better listen intently just like the obedient child. That is what God wants us to do: To be humble and meek, teachable, and leadable.

So when we look back at the last eleven chapters of Numbers, that is kind of what we see. We see a much humbler generation than was there before, following Moses. These children of Israel are quite different from their parents' generation. You can tell from what goes on at the end of Numbers that they are far more content. They do not rebel. They do not make gay pride marches between the tents.

They are not like that. They are not rabble-rousers. They do all these things that good children do. They are amenable to the things Moses says. They are obedient when he gives them a command. And they are even zealous for God in a far greater way than the first generation was. The Bible makes us aware of this fact in the book of Judges. Let us go to Judges. This is at the end of Joshua's life.

Judges 2:7-10 So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

So we know that this generation had some qualities that the other generation that had come out of Egypt did not have. Now, notice here, it says this generation had known the Lord and the work He had done for Israel. It is said in the negative about the next generation, but it is applied to the generation before it. They were not perfect though. No generation is perfect. They had made mistakes along the way.

But, in terms of a comparison between the generation that had been slaves in Egypt and came out and rebelled in the wilderness, this generation that we see in the last eleven chapters of Numbers was exemplary. They did things well. Now they did not complete the work of conquering the land, as God said—that is one mark against them. But they were a far cry better than that former generation. And it shows.

One of the other things that they did not do (and this is something we really need to think about—this is in parallel or in response to what Kim Myers said yesterday): They did not teach their children very well. Because the generation that came up after them, as it says here in verse 10, did not know the Lord nor the work He had done.

So, like Psalm 78 says (which my dad mentioned in his sermon), they did not teach them diligently to their children and to their grandchildren all the things that God had told them, and they ended up, like I said, bloodied terribly. Their lives, after this first generation passed away down the line, were horrible. There was the period of the judges. They were constantly being oppressed, constantly being conquered, and it was because they had forsaken God—because they had not learned it from their parents. So, obviously, this generation was not superlative, but they were better than the ones that came before.

All right. Let us go back to the book of Numbers then, in chapter 27. A new generation requires a new leader.

Numbers 27:12-23 Now the Lord said to Moses: “Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.” (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.) Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying: “Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.” And the Lord said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him [or, as the margin says, ‘commission him’] in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.” So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

As I said, as we are moving forward with this new generation, God decides that it needs a new leader. Of course, Moses had disqualified himself; he could not go any further. So there must needs be a new leader for the whole nation.

It is interesting to think of it in terms of these generations (the old leaders and new leaders) that God mentions here very specifically that Moses himself had disqualified himself in the same way as that other generation—that he had rebelled against God, rebelled against His command. And God did not want any rebels, even Moses, who you would not think as being a rebellious person (as a matter of fact, in Hebrews, it says that he was faithful in all God’s house).

But there was that one time that he rebelled and it was a big sin—because God consistently mentions the fact that at that time, when Moses rebelled, he did not hallow God before the people. If Moses had rebelled in private, let us say, it was not nearly as bad as him rebelling before all the congregation of Israel and seeing him do just as they did. He was supposed to lead them and be a better example, to show them the right way (the godly way), and to be a light to them. But he had failed in that and God said, “No, you can’t enter the land.” By the way, he also did it at the same place that Israel rebelled, which was Kadesh.

So you see that Moses was identified with that former generation at this point, which is sad to see, but we know that he will be there in the Kingdom of God. It just gives you pause to think what one sin can do to your future and your reputation.

The new leader, of course, is Joshua. And it is interesting, let us first understand this (we know this I think), ‘Joshua’ is the same essential name as ‘Jesus’ (Yeshuah). So there is obviously an identification, a parallel, between the two of them. Yeshuah (Joshua, Jesus) was appointed by God as the new leader of a new generation—a generation that He would make His own special people. He is

the one (Jesus) who will go in and conquer and set up His Kingdom in this new Promised Land. Clearly, an obvious parallel there.

What was the thing about Joshua that set him apart? Not just the fact that he had been faithful to Moses all those years and he had been basically their war leader for many years, but one of the big factors, along with Caleb, is that Joshua brought a good report. Put in other words, he brought the gospel, the good news—the gospel of the Promised Land, you might say. That is exactly how Jesus is identified. In Mark chapter 1 verses 14 and 15, Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”

So we have three very clear parallels here: the name, the fact that he brought a good report, and that he will be the one to lead the new generation and conquer the land.

But there is another one that comes out of this and I think this is just as exciting as those others. That is the fact that Moses, in verse 17 here, says that he asked for a leader who will lead them out, bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd. So Joshua not only was the war leader and their new preacher and their new leader, but he was considered the shepherd of Israel at this point.

This is a clear foreshadowing, I believe, of John 10. Let us go there. We see the Good Shepherd here. We will just hop, skip, and jump through chapter 10 and see some of the things that are said about our Shepherd.

John 10:2-3 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Is that not what is said about Joshua—he would bring them in and he would lead them out?

John 10:4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

John 10:7-9 Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”

So now we have the idea of salvation coming here, which is the basic meaning of the root of the name of ‘Jesus’ and ‘Joshua.’ Drop down to verse 14.

John 10:14-16 I am the good shepherd [Jesus says]; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd [which is another little parallel to Joshua with the one nation and one leader].

So our Leader is the One who calls His sheep and leads them out to good pasture. He knows His sheep, and it is His purpose to bring all His sheep into one fold under His sole leadership. And that is certainly His goal in building the church: He is trying to bring us all together into one—His own

body. Is that not what this day is all about—ultimately all humanity being united under Christ? So we can see there is some good parallels here to our situation and to this point of time.

Now, back in Numbers, I just want to look at the timing of this inauguration or commissioning of Joshua. It is essentially the first thing that happens after the census. There is one thing before it which is very interesting, I am not going to go into it right yet; at the end of the sermon, we will. But, right before that, was a judgment that was made for the daughters of Zelophehad.

Zelophehad was an Israelite man from the tribe of Manasseh and he had had only daughters. He left no son. How were these daughters going to keep their father's inheritance is the question. Right after this, after God makes the judgment and Moses gives it to them, then we have the inauguration of Joshua.

But what I think is interesting about its placement here is that what happened in that judgment is that it changed things fairly radically. It changed the thinking of the people very radically. Now, up until this time, the Israelites were functioning under a pretty strict patriarchy, and this question of the daughters of Zelophehad changed that philosophy quite a bit. It was much more radical than we think it is because we are looking at it from the other end where there is no patriarchy, no matriarchy, and everyone is supposed to be equal. That is not how it was with Israel.

What we have here, just before Joshua comes on the scene as the leader (just before Jesus comes on the scene as the leader), we have this intimation (an actual judgment) that shows that their thinking has to begin to change. We see this all through the last part of the Old Testament where prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and some of the minor prophets are giving very specific hints that there is One coming who is going to change our thinking about things—that when this new generation moves forward to the Promised Land (or to the Kingdom of God, in the parallel), they are going to be thinking differently than the ones who came before—because God has inspired a change to be made.

Then we get to Jesus. What did they say about Him? “Oh, He's a radical. He doesn't think like the Jews.” Let us go to Matthew 5. He is very blatant about this. It is not that He does away with anything. That is not it. He just wants us to think about things differently, think more deeply about them and apply the spirit of the law to them.

Matthew 5:21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old [oh yeah, in those former generations], ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’

Nothing wrong with that whatsoever. That was what was taught to the generations before. It is a true thing. You do not want people to murder. That is not good. God has a law against it. It is number six in the Decalogue. There are plenty of laws in the Old Testament that say that when someone murders there is a judgment that must be given against them. Perfectly good. What are Jesus' next words?

Matthew 5:22 "But I say to you . . ."

That is an indication of a change, of a difference in thinking. He is not nullifying what was said in the sixth commandment. He is just letting them know that there is a better way to think about this that makes us even more responsible. So He says:

Matthew 5:22 ". . . whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

So now He reaches right through your chest, into your heart, and He says "This is the problem. You've got this anger inside and it is tantamount to the murder that comes out."

Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

Again, perfectly good law and still in the books.

Matthew 5:28 "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

So He reaches beyond the act and finds its source in the mind and in the heart. This goes on. Verse 31:

Matthew 5:31 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

This is what is said in the law and there is not much keeping them from doing it. But now He says:

Matthew 5:32 "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."

So what He is doing in each of these cases is He is making sure that we understand that it is just not the act that is bad, it is the intent and the thought and the attitude inside that is bad, and that we have got to reach to that point into our own minds and hearts to wrestle it around and pull it out and get rid of it. So what we have here is this parallel to what we will see when we get to it in the daughters of Zelophehad judgment. But I want you to see that the intimation of the change of thinking came before the leader who actually came down and then said it.

So there was plenty in the Old Testament that the people could have used to recognize Christ. Jesus accuses them of that sort of thing. They did not even know their own law. They did not even read it the way they should have read it. So, when He came to them, it was entirely radical but it was entirely godly, and they could not recognize it.

We have to understand that this is happening with us—that we have been called into this chosen generation (the 'royal priesthood,' as it is called; 'God's own special people,' in I Peter 2:9)—and we have been invited to make this change in our own thinking. It is this change in the thinking and then the resultant change in behavior, in conduct, that will make us worthy (through God's Spirit, of course, and His grace) to enter into the Promised Land. We cannot be stuck in the old wrong ways. The old *good* ways are good and we should hold on to those. As for the old *bad* ways, we need to apply this new way of thinking to, where we use the Spirit of God to see deeper than the letter and apply them to our lives.

Let us go back to the book of Numbers. Now we are in chapter 28 and it runs all the way through the end of chapter 29. This is one of those places where I am sure people who read the book of Numbers without a whole lot of understanding fall asleep or they think it is so repetitive or ‘What’s all this about? Why do we have to know all this? It’s just verse after verse after verse about offerings that nobody makes anymore.’

I am sure there will be some who say, “Well, we don’t need this now. Just cut it right out of the Bible.” But it is really very interesting once we get into the details, which we will not do today. But these two chapters are all about offerings—from the daily offerings to the offerings on the holy days. Those span both of these chapters.

What stands out in this list of offerings, over these two chapters, is the sheer, massive amount of offerings that were to be given each day, each Sabbath, each new moon, each holy day; and not only that, each day of the Feast of Tabernacles—every one of them. How many animals were killed on each one of those occasions!

How this pertains to us is the life of sacrifice that God has called His spiritual children to live, and the fact, as these offerings are given on these appointed times, that progress (God’s progress and our progress) along the plan of God will only be accomplished through sacrifice and offering. Nothing moves forward in God’s plan without sacrifice. Of course, we have got the awesome sacrifice of Jesus Christ which works everything out in a godly way and it is wonderful. But it is the people that had to offer these sacrifices. And they offered *a lot* of them.

We realize, of course, that animals died when these sacrifices or offerings were given. They shed their blood as a kind of substitution. But they were also thank offerings; they were peace offerings; they were things given to God, like we give our offerings during the holy days. But let us just read in Matthew 10 because this is very far removed from those offerings that were in Numbers 28 and 29.

Matthew 10:34-36 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s foes will be those of his own household.’ ”

I am sure many of you have had to sacrifice people in your lives (You did not slit their throats, but you had to sacrifice them in a way in order to follow Christ). You had to give up your allegiance to them. You had to spend less time with them. You had to not listen to them in the way you did before. Sometimes you had to pretty much put them out of your lives because of the persecution that they gave to you. Those were sacrifices that had to be made in order to follow Christ. We will go on.

Matthew 10:37-39 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me [that is a pretty big sacrifice]. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross [an implement of execution and death] and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

From that comes the idea, which Paul later enshrines in Romans 12:1, that we are to be living sacrifices. We have to continually lose our lives while we yet live in order to be transformed by the renewing of our minds into the image of Jesus Christ.

We can see examples of this in the New Testament. Jesus, of course, is the perfect example of this. He gave up everything—up to His life—for us. He had no place to lay his head. He wandered about Judea and Samaria and Galilee. He preached and preached and preached. He healed and He cast out demons. He counseled people and He gave them the Good News. He was weary often. Then He had to be taken, imprisoned, scourged, and then crucified for us.

Of course, then there is the apostle Paul. He did the same thing. Paul, on the road to Damascus, immediately gives up his life (a rather good life, a cushy life—a life of leadership, a life of growing popularity among his own people) and then he turned around and preached the Jesus whom he had persecuted. And he was willing to take all the barbs and arrows and whatnot that even people in the church threw at him because he had persecuted the church of God. But he knew that he had been called to do this and he said “Woe unto me if I do not preach the Gospel.” And then he proved it in his body. In II Corinthians 11, he says:

II Corinthians 11:24-28 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

He sacrificed. He offered himself every day just like those daily offerings. And he gave and he gave and he gave until he was spent. He calls himself in Philippians:

Philippians 2:17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

He was cheerfully willing to give all he had to sacrifice for the people.

We are not Jesus. We are not even the apostle Paul. What kind of offerings does God want from us? Let us go to Psalm 51. David cries out here:

Psalm 51:15-19 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God [he explains what he means] are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise. Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness.

So what can we do? What kind of offerings and sacrifices are required of us? We can praise God—that is what he starts with. He opens his mouth to sing forth His praise. We can be good examples of His way of life. We can be humble. We can be teachable. We can be willing to yield to God. We can be eager to please Him. We can be a sacrifice of righteousness by making the proper choices to follow His laws and principles. And even we can help build the walls of Jerusalem by strengthening our relationship with others in the church so that we become strong and we have a bond of love for one another. That is how His disciples will be known.

Now these are only the beginning of sacrifices. They do not have to be sacrifices where we give our bodies to be burned. We do not have to do a lot of those things—not now. But our sacrifices are sacrificing our old way of life, sacrificing our time and energies for God and what He wants us to do.

Let us go back to the book of Numbers. The next chapter deals with vows—essentially, these admonitions on vows.

Numbers 30:1-2 Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

These are essentially keeping one’s word. It all starts with, first of all, keeping our vows to God and, of course, he includes here all of our agreements that we make with other people. He wants us to be honest people who can be trusted, whose word is ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ and nothing in between. Most of all, though, God wants us to be faithful to our agreement with Him. He wants us to keep the covenant. And when we do not keep the covenant, He is very angry and He is very quick to respond. We get instruction on keeping vows all through the Bible. Here, in Ecclesiastes 5, he writes:

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools [that is what he calls people who do not pay their vows]. Pay what you have vowed. It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

Keep your word.

Matthew 5:33 “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’

I will just skip the middle part here and go down to verse 37.

Matthew 5:37 But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

It is Satan wiggling and worming his way into that agreement and into your character, and he is trying to bring you down because what God wants is people who pay their vows. He wants people who are good in their word.

A couple more make this a little bit more apropos to us. Let us go to Revelation 2. He is talking about the churches at the end time. He says to the Smyrnans here:

Revelation 2:10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death [be faithful to the covenant; be faithful to the vows you made to God—promises that you made to Him to be His children], and I will give you the crown of life.

Let us flip over to Revelation chapter 17, talking about the woman and the beast and all that.

Revelation 17:14 “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”

They are loyal to the covenant. They are loyal to Him. So if you want the crown of life, if you want to be with Jesus, you better be faithful—faithful to Him, faithful to what He is doing, faithful to the Father, faithful to Their plan.

Back to Numbers. This is kind of an easy one to see. This is where God tells Moses to tell the people when they go into the land that they are supposed to clear everybody out. And then he says, verse 55:

Numbers 33:55-56 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.

In this case, let us think of the inhabitants of the land as the sins that so easily beset us. God wants us to go in and eradicate everyone because if we leave some of our favorite sins behind saying, “Oh, God doesn’t worry about that one,” He says those are going to come back to bite you. And if they do not, He says “I will.” He wants us to be perfect, be complete, to clear those sins out, to examine ourselves, see where we failed, and root out all those sins so that we can be pure before Him. We have read I Peter chapter 1 before: Be holy as I am holy. It means purity. It means separateness. It means righteousness. It is the way God is.

Let us move on to Numbers 34. Here is God appointing the boundaries of Canaan, and then He appoints leaders to supervise the inheritance of the people. I do not necessarily want to read this, but what comes out here is that God appointed both the boundaries and the leaders who are supposed to supervise the boundaries. He did not tell Moses, “Just pick twelve Joe Blows and they’ll be the ones to do it.” No. He actually names the names and He sets all the boundaries—every one of them. So He gave them their boundaries very specifically, and the leaders who were supposed to supervise those boundaries.

What I am getting at here is that God has not changed in the way that He works. He still appoints the boundaries in the churches and He still appoints the leaders that He wants in the churches. (If you want to, write down I Corinthians 12:13-18 (the famous one), where God sets each one in the body as it pleases Him.) Those are the boundaries that He places.

He places as individuals and as organizations. He says, “This far and no farther.” Paul talks in one place about not wanting to go outside of the sphere of his authority that God had given him. Because God had appointed it to him and He had appointed that other person another sphere and it was not good. Paul knew that God would not like it if he tried to go into that other sphere of the other apostle. So he stayed where he had been placed.

Also, in Ephesians 4:11-13, God clearly says that He gives the ministry—apostles, evangelists, elders, teachers—to the church to teach the people and help them to learn how to serve. And he says, in verse 16 why God does this—this is why God appoints the boundaries and this is why He appoints the leaders:

Ephesians 4:16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

But if we start messing with the lines, the boundaries, and start changing out the people that He has appointed to be in one place or the other, then the body does not grow like it should. So when God does the work—when He sets the people where He wants them to be—then everybody can work together to make sure that growth happens.

Back to Numbers. This is the last one.

Numbers 27:1-11 Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: “Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the Lord, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Therefore give us a possession among the brothers of our father.” So Moses brought their case before the Lord. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father’s brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the kinsman nearest him in his family, and he shall possess it.’ ” And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

So pretty clear here. If a man has no sons, it goes to his daughters; and if he has no daughters, then it is told very clearly where the inheritance is supposed to go. Okay, that is fine. It is good.

Let us go to Numbers 36 where it seems to almost be repeated, but it is not.

Numbers 36:1-3 Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead . . . said: “The Lord commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. Now if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance.

You can see how that allotment of the tribes would get whittled down if they happened to have daughters. So they asked what is going to happen here.

Numbers 36:5 Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the Lord, saying: “What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right.”

They make the change here that they should marry within their tribe and keep the inheritance within the tribe. So the daughters of Zelophehad, who are named again (which is interesting)—the five names are added once more into the record—marry into the tribe of Manasseh which is their own tribe, and their children then were able to keep it within the tribe's inheritance.

We have two judgments here of the exact same situation, but one is a refinement of the other. It was interesting the first one seems to be directly from the Lord. The second one is a little bit less—it says that Moses commanded this according to the word of the Lord. Now I am going to assume that God told him how to judge on this, but it gives a little bit of an indication that what has been written is good enough to make sound judgments. So the original judgment that God had made was sufficient for Moses to make a sound judgment on how to work this out and to use the principles of what was in there.

Judgments must be made to cover specific scenarios and if they are done right, they are based on these sound principles of God's words. But human judgments are limited by human knowledge and understanding and wisdom. Sometimes there will be sound and good judgments, but sometimes time shows that they are wrong—that they are not quite right.

The Worldwide Church of God was infamous for their D & R (divorce and remarriage) judgment back in the 60s and it was proved over many years to have been a wrong judgment. It was not good. It broke up families for sins that had taken place most of the time long before they were ever converted. Those things were washed away in the waters of baptism. They were sins which were passed. They did not recognize that these people had started a new life. And so they were allowing the old life to come in and make demands on them.

Paul makes a few such judgments in God's Word in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 7, on divorce, he says:

I Corinthians 7:12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say. . .

So he makes a judgment (but it was a good judgment) about divorce and how if they separate within the church then they are not to marry at all and et cetera—it goes on there in verses 7 through 16. But, then, the latter part of that same chapter (verse 25), he talks about young people getting married and he makes a judgment where he says “I don't think they should get married now because the Lord is at hand.”

Well, that was like 50-something AD and the church would have died out long ago if there had not been any marriages in the church. So it was premature, in this case. It was not a wrong judgment, but it was certainly premature because Christ did not come back when the apostle thought He would. But what happened was God left it in the Bible so that when the end-time generation comes, they could see the wisdom of Paul on the matter and make a right decision on the matter.

So the lesson is that while we are waiting to cross over into the Promised Land, we must walk in wisdom according to the revelation of God making equitable judgments as best we can. These are frequent things and we have to learn to react positively and godly to them and not rebel if it just so happens not to go our way. We have to be content with the judgments that are made.

Let us finish in Luke 12.

Luke 12:35-40 “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants [even if the night seems to be drawing later and later toward morning]. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

So we are poised, waiting on the edge of our long-awaited goal—the Kingdom of God—just as the Israelites were waiting there, camped on the plains of Moab, ready to cross into the Promised Land. The question is: how ready are we for that command to cross over?

Are we watching ourselves, or are we allowing Satan the chance to cause disruption in our Christian walk? Are we eager to follow our Leader in the work? Only you can answer these kinds of questions.

So let us determine that in this next year we will make great strides in patiently waiting for God, so that when Christ comes we will be those good and faithful servants who open to Him immediately.