

The Death of a Nation

Numbers

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We come to an important passage of Scripture this evening, one that is a bit of a challenge in the sense that there is a lot of difficult interaction with sinful people found in the text that we're going to see in the book of Numbers here this evening. For those of you that are just joining us for the first time in a while or the first time on a Tuesday night, what we've been doing this fall is we have been doing a survey of the first five books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, and we've gone through Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus and we come now to the book of Numbers just intending to do a very brief survey, brief in the sense that it's one message for 36 chapters, doing a survey to just get ourselves familiar with some of the basic narrative history of the Bible and seeing some of the theological themes that arise from that. So what we find and what we've discussed in times gone by is that the books of Moses are absolutely foundational to understanding the rest of the Bible. You lay the foundation and then build the structure on it. In the five books of Moses, you have the foundation of the Bible and you really don't well understand the Bible unless you have some kind of familiarity with what's going on in the first five chapters. So that's why we're taking some time to look at these books here on Tuesday evening.

Now, what we've seen is that in the book of Exodus, God gave birth to a nation and he gave them laws in the book of Leviticus to show how they were to approach him. They were meant to be a theocratic people. God was going to rule this people directly and so he has given them his laws and he has brought them out of Egypt and now they are on the precipice of going into the Promised Land; this nation of two and a half-million people had the Promised Land set before them and God in their midst in order to lead them, and that's kind of the setting for the book of Numbers.

Now, look at Numbers 10 with that in mind and we're skipping over so many, many things for the sake of doing a survey. Numbers 10:11 here. We just want to kind of pick up the historical narrative and get a sense of context as we begin here this evening. Numbers 10:11, "Now in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran." So here they are, God has just miraculously delivered them from the nation of Egypt; they have walked through a sea on dry land with walls of water

on either side. God had delivered them by 10 miraculous plagues that he placed on the people of Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to let the Jewish people leave Egypt and become their own nation. So what we see from that little bit of context, is that God is strong and mighty and powerful to deliver and that it would be no problem from the perspective of the power of God to deliver these people into the Promised Land that he had promised to Abraham many centuries earlier. What we see in the book of Numbers, sadly, however, is that these two and a half-million people were not ready to be the people of God. What the book of Numbers shows us is, in a manner of speaking, it shows us the death of the nation that God had brought out of Egypt; it shows the death of that nation as Israel fell into sin again and again and again. And Numbers illustrates the same principles that we've seen back in the book of Genesis: sin, judgment, and the grace of God, and that's the way that we're going to structure the message here tonight is around those themes of sin, judgment and grace.

Now, let me step back for just a moment and address even a Scripture that I would encourage you young people, those of you that are in your early teen years and before and after, a verse to encourage you to shape your life around. Turn to the book of Proverbs 9. This is a little bit of a detour but that's okay. Proverbs 9:10 says that, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." What we're seeing here as we survey these early books of the Bible, is the fact that God is a God who must be feared. God is a holy God. He is a God who judges sin. He judges people and he judges them severely for their sin and unbelief. For those of you who are young in the audience tonight, here is your opportunity to set a cornerstone in your mind and in your heart and in your approach to life to say, "I will be a young person, I will become a young man, a young woman, who fears the Lord so that I am positioned for his blessing rather than his judgment." That is the way that you should think as a young person. Don't put it off. Don't say, "I'll wait and then I'll figure out life later." Make up your mind now that you will become a godly person and today will be the day that you start, and as we study the book of Numbers, we'll see why the fear of the Lord is so important for us to embrace that we might avoid the fate that fell upon these people.

So we're going to structure it around those themes of sin, judgment, and grace. First of all, the sin of man. This is the same outline we used in Genesis in the first couple of messages on Genesis. The sin of man. I want you to see these themes don't change as things go along. What happened as Israel set off into the wilderness following that pillar of cloud which represented the presence of the Lord? What happened in the subsequent time in their experience? What we see is in the book of Numbers is that Israel, the people of Israel, repeatedly grumbled and sinned in the wilderness in such an inexcusable way that the only thing that was proper was for God to judge them accordingly.

Now, God had brought them out of Egypt. They had been delivered from slavery, and as part of his deliverance, God was providing daily food for them in the form of manna. Turn to Exodus 16. We want to see the big picture, if we can, and that's what we're aiming after here tonight. Exodus 16:4, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every

day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction." Now look over at verse 35 of Exodus 16, we see that, "The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan."

Now, what should we think about this? Let's just think big picture here about what's going on. Here are the people of Israel who had been enslaved harshly under the leadership of Egypt and they had cried out and God had delivered them. They were on the receiving end of a magnificent work of God that led them out from the greatest nation on earth at that time and established them as a separate people with God in their midst and God providing miraculously food for them day by day by day. That's the context of what happened. Now, the question is: how should they have responded to that from within their heart? What should their attitude have been as a result of what God had done for them? They should have been grateful, obedient people. That would be the only righteous response to make. "Our God has intervened on our behalf. He has delivered us and, look, day by day, he feeds us with food that no one else has, we just have to go out and gather it but we have this miraculous provision day after day in our midst," and they should have been a grateful, humble, thankful people to God. That's what they should have been but the question is: were they grateful? You know the answer. No, they weren't. They manifested the sin of their heart instead. They were sinful and rebellious in three different ways that we're going to just look at very briefly with just representative passages. If you read Numbers, you can multiply these examples many times over but, first of all, despite their privileged position, Israel, first of all, they rejected their circumstances. They rejected their circumstances. They rejected their privileged position and said, "We don't like it like this." Time forbids us from making a thorough overview of this but a summary statement will help us.

Turn to Numbers 11. Numbers 11:1 is a summary statement that shows us how they responded overall to their position now that God has led them out. In Numbers 11:1 it says, "Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD; and when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled." Can you imagine? We need to step back and look at the big picture here. Yes, they're in the wilderness and the wilderness is not a very comfortable place to exist perhaps, but the fact of the matter is that they were direct eyewitnesses of a mighty display of the power of God that was exercised on their behalf; that was done for their good; that released them from harsh bondage, and they were enjoying the direct feeding hand of God, and yet they're grumbling about it as if they were in the midst of adversity. This is very, very wrong. And why did they complain? It was because they hated their circumstances.

Look at verse 4, Numbers 11:4, "The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, 'Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.'" This is culpable. This is inexcusable. Rather than giving worship and honor to the God of their salvation, not spiritual salvation but their physical salvation of deliverance from Egypt, rather than giving thanks to him, instead

they show that their God is their belly. They just wanted food, they did not want to enjoy their privileged position. They hated their circumstances and you see this hatred represented elsewhere as you go through the book of Numbers. We won't take time to look at the passages but here's what I want you to think about because as we see how God dealt with them, it may seem severe but it wasn't. Remember that we said when we studied Exodus that God had delivered these people so that they would be a kingdom of priests for him; that they would manifest the glory of God to other nations. We saw that in Exodus 19. He had delivered them and said, "You will be a kingdom of priests for me in fulfillment of my promises to Abraham. You will be the people through whom which I bring blessing to the other nations." Now, this situation based on their response, made that absolutely impossible. The people hated where God had brought them and they complained against him. Think with me just a little bit: how could a people like that ever mediate the glory of God which is what the Jews were supposed to do? They hated God, they hated their circumstances, they wanted to go back to Egypt simply for the sake of their belly. This is a generation of people who are utterly unworthy of the privileged position that God has given to them. And so there is a problem, they were completely unqualified for the great call that God had made upon the Jewish people because they rejected their circumstances.

Now, going further, they rejected their leadership as well. This is all a manifestation of the sin of man, the sin of Israel: they rejected their circumstances, they rejected their leadership as well. They were jealous of Moses and they demanded an equal voice with the leader that God had uniquely appointed for them. For example, look at Numbers 12:1, "Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); and they said, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?' And the LORD heard it." Now, Moses was the uniquely chosen and appointed leader of the people by the hand of God. Moses was in his position not because he pushed his way into it, but because God had put him there, so to rebel against Moses was to rebel against the God who established him in the position in the first place. It wasn't merely a horizontal human rebellion that was going on, this grumbling against Moses helps us see the spirit of their hearts. Their rejection of God's purpose is seen in the fact that they rejected God's leader as well.

Look over at the book of Numbers 16 where you can see another example of this. Numbers 16, "Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?'" Now, the only reason that we're looking at that is simply illustrative, simply to see what this generation of Israelites was like. They complained about their circumstances and preferred food from Egypt in slavery rather than the freedom of the sons of God receiving miraculous food day by day. They wanted to elevate themselves and did elevate themselves against

God's chosen leader. They rejected their circumstances. They rejected the leadership that God had appointed for them. And so we see, as these things start to unfold, the fact that they actually wanted nothing to do with what God had for them. They were completely unfit for the great purpose and call that God had put on their lives.

Now, as you continue to dive a little bit more deeply into the book of Numbers, we come to the real heart of the problem, the ultimate rejection: they even rejected the Promised Land. They rejected the Promised Land, the land that God had promised to give to them, that generation of Israelites said, "We will not have it." And we'll spend just a little bit more time here. God had Moses send spies into the land of Canaan where he was ultimately going to bring his people. He sent spies to check out the land so that they would be able to evaluate what it would take to conquer that land for their purposes and you can see this in Numbers 13:1-2, and we'll read a few more extended passages of Scripture because this is so pivotal in the life of Israel. Numbers 13:1, "The LORD spoke to Moses saying, 'Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them.'" Then in the verses that follow, the exact man from each tribe is identified who is sent out as a spy. What happened? The spies went into the land and they came back and they gave their report and the majority report, 10 to 2, the majority report said, "This land is a good land but we are not strong enough to take it. The people there are too big and strong for us to overcome."

Look at verse 25 now in this very pivotal moment of this generation that saw the mighty hand of God on display in their deliverance from Egypt, that saw the world's greatest army perish at the powerful hand of God, here's how they responded when spies come back and say, "There's another land to conquer." Numbers 13:25, "When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land." There is this massive meeting and the spies are giving their report which is intimately tied to the future of this nation of people, this mass of people. They are coming back and they're giving their report.

Verse 27, "Thus they told him, and said, 'We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.'" So they say, "We'll eat good here, this land would feed us well," verse 28, but, "Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan." These spies, these 10 spies as they are giving their report, are being the masters of the impossible. They're saying, "This land is there but it is impossible for us to succeed because the opposition will be too strong. We will go and we will fight but we will perish because we're not able to do it." Taking a completely horizontal view of the situation, completely leaving out inexcusably the fact that God was sending them and God had just delivered them from an

even greater nation than what they had given witness to. So this was utterly culpable. This was utterly sinful for them to speak in this way.

So the people got roused stop about it and said, "Why are we doing this? Why we considering this?" Verse 30, Caleb, one of the other two spies, Caleb and Jacob, in verse 30, "Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said," and here's the way a man of God should speak, "'We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.' But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.' So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.'" So you see the picture, this report has been given, the majority report says, "We can't go in. We'll be defeated. We're going to die there." Caleb and later you'll see Joshua saying, "No, let's rise up and go in. The Lord will give these people into our hands." So one speaking out of a courageous faith, the others speaking through culpable, unforgivable unbelief.

And how did the people respond here? Chapter 14, verse 1, "Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!'" They're saying, "I'd rather be dead than have what's ahead of us." Verse 3, "'Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'" Wow, are you kidding me? You were just delivered from there. Have you forgotten the slavery? Have you forgotten the way that you were abused there? Have you forgotten the fact that you were not even a people? You were just miserable slaves and you were brought out by miraculous power from God and you're saying you want to go back? You want to cross the Red Sea and go back? How can that be?

Well, verse 5, "Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel." Verse 6, "Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, 'The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us - a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.'" But the people rejected the advice. Verse 10, "all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel." Do you see what happened here? This greatly privileged people, this people blessed by the power and the love of God, rejected what God had for them. They said, "Stone the people who would try to bring us into that land. Let's go with the

majority. Let's believe what the majority says and let's hightail it back to Egypt where we can be safe again." Completely rejecting the very purpose of their national existence. The question is: how could they believe that way? Stated differently, how could they disbelieve God after everything that he had just done for them with signs and wonders, miraculously acting on their behalf?

Put all of the pieces together, beloved, the grumbling about their circumstances, the grumbling against God's chosen leadership, the grumbling and the rejection of his purpose for them. God had made it plain that that is where they were to go and they said, "No, we will not have that." As we said earlier, how could a people like that possibly be the mediators of the presence of God? Their rejection of the purpose of God shows how much the sin of unbelief and the sin of rebellion so completely dominated their hearts. They had been relocated geographically but they had not been renewed spiritually and the sin of their heart and their rebellion against God was on full, unarguable, undisputable display.

Now, a couple of things just in passing; just little points to kind of give us a way to think rightly about discernment and to just think through something here. You understand, don't you, that we don't measure what is true by a majority vote. It does not matter to us that what we believe when we uphold the inerrancy of Scripture, it does not matter to us when we uphold the exclusivity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we say that there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved, you understand, don't you, that when the world rejects that and criticizes and mocks that and condemns that position and there is a majority against us when we say these things and support them and stand for them, you understand, don't you, that truth is not measured by majority vote, that truth is measured by the word of God alone and if we stand alone in standing for the truth of the Gospel, we stand unmoved. We stand unthreatened because we understand that the world and the majority of people in the world have nothing to contribute from their unbelieving hearts to help us understand what truth is. And the people of Israel had the opportunity to believe the minority report, to believe Joshua, to believe Caleb, and to believe the God that was speaking through them and say, "Yes, let's follow after them. Stone the majority." But they didn't. They weren't interested in that. They went with the majority.

What we need to see and what you as parents need to teach your children is that we don't measure truth by what everyone else believes. We read and study the word of God for ourselves, we take that to heart, and whatever God says is what we believe whether anyone is standing with us or not. In the height of the Trinitarian controversy in the fourth century, a man named Athanasius was the only one who was upholding the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and all of the other people who were involved in the church councils were imposing him and trying to pressure him into relenting and sacrificing the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity for the sake of the majority opinion, and it was said to him, "Athanasius," it's reported that it was said to him, "Athanasius, the world is against you." And Athanasius replied, "Then I am against the world." That's the spirit of fidelity and loyalty and trust and obedience that we manifest in our spiritual lives. We act out of conviction, not by what we see going around us. We act

out of an internal certainty based on the testimony of God to his word not influenced by what unbelieving voices say to us. So we just stand on the word of God alone and that's what Joshua and Caleb were doing here in Numbers and that is the way, that is the pattern that we are to follow as well.

So we have seen the sin of man and we have seen that it's not excused by the fact that the majority was going with them. Well, let's take a look at the judgment of God on this situation. You see the principle of the judgment of God manifested when Miriam challenge Moses. Go back to Numbers 12, we'll just pick up that story just briefly to see that God does not treat sin lightly. God deals with sin. God judges sin and when Miriam challenged Moses, God struck her with leprosy.

Look at Numbers 12:9 where it says, actually let's go back up to verse 5, "The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, He said, 'Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth.'" Go down to the end of verse 8, "'Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?'" God says, "You should have been afraid to speak against him because he's my man. When you speak against Moses, you're speaking against me," God is saying to them. So in retribution, in punishment of their sin, verse 9, "The anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed. But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous." God struck her with leprosy because of her sin of rebellion against the leadership that he had appointed. And you see other elements of judgment in Numbers 16 and Numbers 21 and Numbers 25. We won't take the time to turn there, just to acquaint you with the fact that this judgment against sin is a prevalent theme in the book of Numbers. Sin and judgment, sin and judgment going on, but the ultimate judgment, the surpassing judgment, was upon the people for rejecting the Promised Land.

Look at Numbers 14:26. It's so striking. "The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. Say to them, "As I live," says the LORD, "just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you,"' verse 29, "'your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me.'" Verse 30, "'Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.'" God says, "Here's the judgment, you have rejected me, you have grumbled against me, you don't want this land, you want to go back to Egypt, here's the judgment on that inexcusable sin: you're going to die in the wilderness as a result. You will be struck dead." And he says the two people who will escape this, two people out of about two million since it was 20 years and younger, only the two people who believed God would enter, everyone else would perish, everyone else would die.

Look at verse 31, ""Your children, however,"" God continuing to speak to them, ""Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey - I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness."" Verse 34, ""According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition. I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.""

This is really harsh, isn't it, in one sense? This is very dramatic. This is very severe. And without doubt, people not familiar with the Bible would look at that and raise accusations against God that this is unfair, that this is unkind, where is the loving God that supposedly exists in the Bible? But, beloved, let's enter into something really significant here, shall we? Let's enter into a knowledge and an understanding of God based on what we're seeing in God's word here today. If this seems harsh to us, if that seems overly severe to us, there's only one thing to say: it's because we don't understand. If it strikes you as severe and harsh and unfair and unjust, it's because we don't understand. God had shown great signs to these people. God had spoken to them. God had delivered them. God had provided a leader for them. God had provided food for them. God had done everything for them. God was God and they are rejecting him? They are rejecting his purpose. They are rejecting the land. They are rejecting the circumstances. They are rejecting his leadership that he has posed for them. God is holy. Sin against him is inexcusable. There is no excuse for this.

There is no justification for what Israel was doing in the wilderness there and what you need to see, what I want to point out to you is that these people, this nation, the generation of that nation maybe is the best way to say it, the generation that God was judging like this was not the victim of trying circumstance. Their failure was not due to inexcusable frustration because things just weren't going their way and we really should overlook it; God should have overlooked it because, after all, it was kind of a hard situation that they were in. No. Their rejection of their circumstances, the leadership, their rejection of the Promised Land, was nothing less than sinful, culpable unbelief, inexcusable unbelief and disobedience against their holy God that has no way of excusing.

With that in mind and to get the biblical commentary on that point, turn over to Hebrews 3, if you would, at the passage that I read earlier. Hebrews 3, the Bible makes this very, very plain as Scripture interprets Scripture for us. Hebrews 3:16, "Who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." That is the Scripture-inspired commentary on the events from Numbers that we have been seeing and looking at here tonight. They were guilty of a

culpable unbelief that required the judgment of God. God must vindicate his holiness. God must vindicate the testimony that he has given to himself. His word must stand. His word must be honored. His word must be treated as holy.

So, God having displayed himself so richly and so greatly to them, to see in response their unbelief, the only thing that was left, their settled unbelief, their settled rejection, their repeated rejection of what God had done for them, under all of that, the only proper thing to do was to judge it because God is holy, God is separate, God is sanctified, and the men who were on the receiving end of his revelation must respond, are required to respond, are accountable to respond in belief and humble submission. It's the same principle laid out in Romans 1 when it talks about how God has made himself known in creation and men refuse that and reject it and harden their minds toward it and suppress the knowledge of the truth. It's all culpable. They are to be judged for that because the revelation of God cannot be rejected without consequence to man. So as we're thinking through these things and trying to draw the really big principles from them, what we should see is that God is glorious, God is holy, God is a God to be feared, God is a God to be respected and worshiped and to bow down before. And when men do not do that, there are judgment consequences that follow and it is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews says it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. So when we see these things in the book of Numbers, we are to pay heed. We are to think about our own situation as a result.

Look at Hebrews 3. How are we supposed to respond? How should we think about this? And you young people, again, those of you that are still living under your parents roofs, I want you to listen to me tonight, you need to hear this, you need to pay heed, you need to take this seriously. Your parents bring you under the sound of God's word faithfully and you're here week after week and you're hearing it and you're gathered together in a great place of privilege to gather together with the people of God as God's word is taught and as God's people hear and respond to it. Well, Scripture would tell you in particular and those of you adults as well, that we need to take account of what we're doing and to be mindful of what we're doing. This is not a social gathering. We're not here to be of community service and to make the water supply better for other people. We're gathering together in the presence of a holy God under his holy word and there are consequences to that and Scripture tells us to take heed and to examine ourselves as a result when we gather together like this.

Look at Hebrews 3:12. You young people in particular, when all you know is a Christian environment and you stand a little bit apart from it and you don't really want it, well, here's what Scripture would say to you. Verse 12, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Are you here tonight and do you live life with a grumbling, unbelieving heart even though you find yourself in the midst of the people of God? Well, the message of the book of Numbers is a warning to you. Here were these people with all the privileges of God and they perished in the wilderness because they did not believe. Well, in like manner, here we are gathered together week

after week in a congregation of people who love Christ and who love the teaching and the content of God's word. Well, we shouldn't assume that all of us in this room without exception are born again Christians. That's not the case. Scripture warns you, "You take heed. You take heed and examine your heart lest there be an unbelieving heart that isn't actually conforming with the surroundings that you find yourself in when you gather together with the people of God." God warns us. God will be treated as holy. His word will be honored. His revelation will be respected. And for those who would come and trivialize with it, there is a warning.

Look at Hebrews 4:1. I fear for you who trivialize the word of God with your indifference in your attitude of pride against it. Look at what Hebrews 4:1 would say to you. Everybody turn there, right? You young people, you've got your Bibles open, that's what you should do. Hebrews 4:1, "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also." If you've come to Truth Community for any time at all, you have had the Gospel preached to you just like the people in the book of Numbers had God's word revealed to them, had God's mighty act on display to them. You've had good news preached to you just like they also, "but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." They did not repent. They did not receive God's word. They did not submit to his revelation. They did not submit to his work in the nation. The writer of Hebrews is saying, "For those of you who are hearing the word of God in the Christian church now today, you be careful lest the same miserable fate falls to you as well. And you examine your heart to see if you have truly repented and truly put your faith in Christ or not." What a shame it would be to be gathered with the people of God under the teaching of God's word on a consistent basis, you young people, what a shame it would be if you would spin out because of your own unbelief and spiritual indifference and spin out into judgment when you had all the privileges of the Gospel presented to you week by week by week just because you didn't care enough to pay attention and put your faith in Christ. These things are sobering. They matter. We're not playing games. God doesn't play games with his revelation.

So as we read the book of Numbers, we're warned for ourselves about how we should respond and examine ourselves and it's a fearsome thing and for those of you, the many of you who like me, you are in Christ, well, we should just humble ourselves all over again, shouldn't we? We rejected it a long time, didn't we? We spurned it. Even now we sometimes fall into patterns of indifference and prayerlessness even as God provides for us day by day by day. We humble ourselves as the recipients of grace rather than elevating ourselves as those who are somehow better than others. But all of this, these themes of God's holiness and sin and judgment, should make us those who walk in a humble fear of God. That's what the word of God should do in your heart.

Well, let's end on a note of grace here in verse 3. We've seen the sin of man, the judgment of God, and even in Numbers we still see the grace of God on display. Even in the midst of his judgment, God, because he is a gracious God, because he is a merciful God, it's as though he can't help but be gracious in the midst even of his judgment. Even as he is judging these people, he is still showing grace to them. He was gracious even to this

rebellious people. He tempered the daily judgment at times, and provided for means for relief.

Look at Numbers 21:4, we'll turn to, "They set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey." They are sinning yet again. "The people spoke against God and Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.'" Verse 6, "The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died." So in verse 7, "The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.' And Moses interceded for the people." Here they are guilty, here they are deserving death by their own acknowledgment they are guilty before God, and therefore would have rightly, it would have been right and fair for God to have just let them perish on the spot, but God provided a means of relief to them in verse 8, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.' And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived." Simply for a look of faith toward the provision that God had made, that temporal judgment of the fiery serpents would be withdrawn from them and they would live instead of perish. That's the grace of God.

Now, think a little bit more with me: in this massively guilty nation of people, who could have criticized the Lord if he had simply separated them from his presence forever, if God had simply said, "You are so unworthy, you have so rejected my promises, you have so rejected what I have done that I am not going to deal with you anymore and your whole nation will perish, not just the generation 20 years and older." Who could have complained? God didn't do it that way. With such a guilty nation, God still granted to the second generation the promises that he had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God graciously continued the promise even though an entire generation of them turned their back on him.

Look at Numbers 14:30. This is the grace of God. I want you to see it. This is the unmerited favor of God granting goodness where judgment was warranted. Numbers 14:30, "Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb and Joshua. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey - I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected." God graciously keeping his promises that date back at that point 700 years to the time of Abraham; God graciously being faithful to his promise and carrying out what he said he would do even though this people had sinned so greatly against him.

Beloved, do you see that the sin of man does not frustrate the ultimate purpose of God? Do you realize that God accomplishes his purpose even in the face of the sin and unbelief of men? That God is not subject to the rebellion of man but God's ruling judgment, God's ruling power, is always overruling sin to accomplish his purposes? Two and a half million people sinned against him and yet his purpose carried mightily forward all the

same. The generation that disobeyed did not enjoy the blessing. God's promise endured in the next generation as you see in the book of Joshua, received it. God would still have his nation. God would still accomplish his purposes. God would still graciously keep the covenant he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is gracious. God does good even in the face of sin.

Well, what's our takeaway from this study? We've already seen some of it in the need to examine ourselves, but there's a little bit more. If your grumbling rebellious spirit has exposed a sinful heart, God in that gracious unmerited way, still extends an offer of forgiveness to you that is rooted even in the book of Numbers.

Turn over to the Gospel of John 3. We've seen the negative side of how this convicts us and warns us lest there be an unbelieving unrepentant heart in our midst. Well, if you have sensed the conviction of the Holy Spirit on your heart and you say, "I am that man," a word of grace as we close to you straight from the offering hand of God. Look at John 3:14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." The Lord Jesus Christ was lifted up on a cross for sinners, not to relieve them from a fiery serpent biting them physically, but to rescue them from the fiery serpent, the spiritual serpent, the devil himself, who would enslave them and carry them off into hell. As captives of Satan under the judgment of God, under the judgment for sin, here Scripture says that the Son of Man has been lifted up for you. The Son of Man on a cross for you. The Son of Man bearing the penalty of sin for you. And how would you be forgiven? Verse 15, "so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."

I'm just motivated for some reason to talk especially to you young people tonight, to just lay before you once again one more time, that God has warned you. God has called sin to your attention. God has convicted you through his word, through the leadership of your parents, through the testimony of your own conscience. Young people, don't harden yourself against that convicting work. Look to Christ. Come to Christ repentantly, humbly, saying, "I need a Savior. Save me," because it is laid out for you, the offer is right here, the promise of God is right before you. It will never be closer than it is right now, that whoever believes in Christ will find forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Young people, you know full well that your grumbling sour disposition is a testimony of your own unbelieving heart. God brought you here tonight to convict you of that so that you would truly repent and put your faith in Christ. Yes, you've heard the message 1,000 times maybe, but it's time to acknowledge that the message has never taken root, that your heart has still been hard but now tonight would be the night that you would look to Christ and be saved. That's what Numbers has for us. It has warning and it has the promise of blessing. God lifted one up that you could look to him and be saved. The Lord Jesus Christ will save you for a repentant, trusting look to the cross.

Let's bow together prayer.

Our Father, take these words and use them in our hearts. We want not only to understand the history of Israel, we want to understand the salvation of our own souls. We acknowledge, our Lord, that there was once in all of us an evil unbelieving heart that

spurned your revelation. Those of us that know you, thank you for the work of God that changed us and made us into new creatures in Christ.

Father, we are burdened tonight, we're burdened and warned and sobered by the words of the writer of Hebrews who said, "Take care lest there be in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart." Father, you know the hearts of everyone here. You know those who belong to you, you know those who do not. Father, we acknowledge, we humble ourselves, you could rightly look in judgment at all of that unbelief, that culpable inexcusable unbelief and disobedience and judge it right now. Father, we appeal to your grace and we ask that you would show favor, show kindness, even though it's not deserved, to that one, to those several who are still in unbelief and rejecting Christ and hard and cold against him. Father, we can't look into their hearts but you can. You alone have the power to help them and assist them. We ask you, Father, to do that and we pray that as your Spirit moves on their heart, that they would respond in repentance and faith to the Lord Jesus Christ and that someone would walk out of this room tonight out of teaching from the book of Numbers that you took and used and converted them for their eternal salvation. Father, we plead with you to be gracious; just as you were gracious to some of us, be gracious now to the rest of us unto salvation. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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