

Good morning. Oh, what was that? No, no, I heard someone say, could you show us some photos from your trip to WA?

How lovely of you to ask. Yeah, look, I've got some photos just here for you. So this is some of the beautiful scenery of WA.

You can clap if you want. What is the common denominator in those photos? Well, we weren't, but the sun, the sun is sometimes front and center, and you're looking at the sun, but all of the photos reveal things because of the sun.

And that leads us to CS. Lewis in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, the great little quote, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.

We don't only appreciate the sun by looking at it. We appreciate it because it allows us to comprehend everything. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 11, for from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever, amen. He's talking about Christ, the sun, S-O-N, who is glorious in every way and constantly illuminating life and giving life and sustaining life.

And this is why we're studying the whole Bible, Lord willing, in two years, in a series called Christ in Scripture. Christ is like the sun, isn't he? In the Bible, sometimes he's front and centre.

It's all about the sun, Jesus, but he's always there, amen.

Overview of the Book of Numbers

Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible, and it carries forward the story of Israel after their exodus from slavery in Egypt. It's called Numbers because there are a lot of numbers.

There is a census and the 12 tribes are all listed in many different ways, but it could also be called The Adventure Begins because that's what it is.

God has rescued his people from Egypt in dramatic and miraculous ways, brought them to Mount Sinai and entered into a covenant relationship with them.

They were already in relationship, but he gave them more specificity about that covenant relationship when Moses went up the mountain and was given the Ten Commandments.

Despite Israel's immediate rebellion, you remember when he was up the mountain, Aaron was encouraged to take gold and create a golden calf and they did, and it was terrible idolatry.

But even though they were rebellious, God said, I want you to be my people and I will be with you. I will be with you.

The Book of Numbers begins as the people of God end their one-year stay, their one-year stay at Mount Sinai and head off into the wilderness towards the land God had promised Abraham. So we're going to follow the story. The story is very important.

We said three weeks ago, for God, story is pretty much right up there, paramount because it reveals who he is, who his son is and what he's doing in the world.

So we're going to look at the story of Israel, see what Christ is doing in that story, like what pointers, markers, tells, look to Jesus, and then ask the question, what does it mean for us?

So the story, Israel's story, Christ in the story and our story.

Requirements for Relationship

So the first 10 chapters, we're moving through the whole book. The first 10 chapters of Numbers speak to requirements for relationship, and let's consider Israel's story, Christ in the story, and our story.

As the people of God ready themselves for an 11-day journey, did you remember that? It's an 11-day journey from Mount Sinai to the promised land.

As they prepare, they are told how they are to set up camp around the tabernacle of the presence of God, and it was to look like this. This is a great picture from Bible Project.

You have the tabernacle and the Levites and the priests around the tabernacle. They're going to minister out of the presence of God, the holiness of God to the people, and the tribes are to be set up just like that with Judah at the head.

Numbers 2 verse 2 says, The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family. God is holy. We know that.

It's certainly what we've read about in Leviticus. And there are requirements for relationship with him. There's a problem.

Sin has entered the world. And we read about that in Genesis 3. And so we have a holy God wanting to be with an unholy people.

And so we have a system of purity laws and rituals that were taught primarily about in Leviticus to create a situation where the people are made holy by the grace of God. So that the people can be with the God who wants to be their God.

Numbers 5.3 says, The Lord said to Moses, Command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has a defiling skin disease or a discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body, send away male and female alike,

send them outside the camp so they will not defile the camp where I dwell among them. So again, just a brief reminder that they are unclean and they have to go through rituals to become clean, a carryover from the instructions from Leviticus.

And then God explains how things are to work when it's time to move. So when they set up camp, there's a way to do it. How they live in camp, there are ways to live that allow them to clean their sin.

And then Numbers 9 says, Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out. Wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the Lord's command, the Israelites set out, and at His command, they encamped.

So there's a rhythm. For this 11-day journey to the Promised Land, and beyond into the Promised Land, Numbers 2 says that God is to be at the centre of the community. Numbers 5 says the presence requires holiness.

There are rituals to follow. God's presence will direct them, Numbers 9. It's not just up to them to guide and decide when to leave.

They will be led by God because God is their king. So where do we see Christ in Numbers so far? Well, the cross shape of the camp is pretty sun-like, isn't it?

What sort of points our eyes future into the future towards Jesus? The cross shape of the camp, the sacrificial system where blood is shed for life to be imparted and sin covered is pretty sun-like, isn't it? It's really Christ in Numbers.

And the presence of God in the midst of his people reminds us of John 1, through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made, in him was life and that life was the light of all mankind.

Christ is the life of God in the soul of a believer. The tabernacle of Numbers is the human heart. So we can clearly see there's a pointer to Jesus.

How does this affect our story? Well, the JB. Phillips translation says in Colossians 1, He is the centre.

He is the centre. Jesus is the centre of everything and holds everything together. Christ is the middle of the camp.

I don't think it's hard to see the connection. It's a beautiful connection. Colossians 3 says Christ is all and is in all.

Did anyone have or still have this little saying on a plaque? My grandparents had this. Christ is the head of this house, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.

Anybody have that or seen it? It's a current modern picture of the tabernacle, isn't it? That God is central, that Jesus is central.

I wondered, in the workplace, it might sound like this. Christ is the head of this workplace, the unseen guest at every meeting, the witness to every decision, the listener to every word spoken here.

I encourage you to consider that, that idea that Christ is central to all that we do. What about a couple dating? They could have a plaque that's on the car, on the dashboard.

Christ is the center of this relationship, the unseen guest in every intimate moment we share, the guide of every step we take, the listener to every word we speak. He is the center.

So the people of God are ready to step out Numbers 10, verse 11 says, on the 20th day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the covenant law.

Then the Israelites set out from the desert of Sinai and travelled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the desert of Paran. They set out this first time at the Lord's command through Moses. Wow, what a journey they had ahead of them.

But things didn't go quite as planned.

Consequences for Contumacy

The next section of Numbers teaches us about the consequences for contumacy. Now, just out of interest, you know what contumacy means, don't you? Who doesn't know what contumacy means?

I haven't found one person who does yet, so do you know? You do know. Very well done, Stuart.

What does it mean? Pride, yeah, it's rebellious disobedience in the dictionary I found. Rebellious disobedience.

Contumacy is the word you find when you ask the computer, can you give me a word starting with C that means rebellious disobedience? And so it comes back, contumacy. And I think that's a word for us to remember.

It's a good, it's from the like, contumous or conchymousness of the court. It's a legal word apparently. But this is certainly what we find in five vignettes in the next ten chapters, that the people of God are rebellious and disobedient.

And there are consequences for their contumacy, which means rebellious disobedience. So I want to just quickly remind us of four of the five story vignettes that we find in Numbers 10 to 20. Numbers 11, 1 to 3, the first outbreak of complaint.

I'll read the text. Now the people complained about their hardship in the hearing of the Lord. And when he heard them, his anger was aroused.

Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. The first signal that the wilderness journey is going wrong, the people begin to complain immediately. They start whinging.

The food's no good, it's too hot. And God is swift in punishing them. Now, as I was reading it, and I can imagine some of you reading Numbers, let me ask you, anyone that was reading Numbers wonder, why is that there?

There are some times that you're like, I just don't get it. And so we trust the sovereign wisdom of God for why we find certain things in the Bible.

But certainly the big narrative pieces of the story, I think we have to in humility come under them and allow the truth to speak to us and say, that story is in there because God chose it to be in there and you should come under it. Amen.

So what am I to learn about the first disobedience? What am I to learn about God's swift judgment on complaint? The second vignette is probably a better known one.

God says, I want to send out 12 spies and you can scout out the promised land. They're at Peran on the edge of the promised land. 12 men go in and check out the land and then come back and tell us what you see.

So you remember what happened? 10 of them come back and say, oh, that is a scary place. They are really big in there.

And two of them, Caleb and Joshua say, there's big people, it's scary, but I think our God will be strong enough for us. And God's response is judgment. He judges their unbelief, Numbers 14.

Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephthah and Joshua son of Nun. In the story of Israel, this moment is huge, isn't it? It really is.

It's huge. The people look at what God has for them. It's going to involve courage and belief, trust in their God.

And they say, we're not up for it. So the result is a whole generation is condemned to die in the wilderness. An 11 day journey will now become 40 years.

What are we meant to learn from that? We've got to learn something. We come under the story.

The third vignette is the Rebellion of Korah, where 250 Israelites rise up against the leadership of Moses. Let me read from chapter 16 verse 28.

Moses said, this is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea.

If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, these are the 250 that have risen up against him, then the Lord has not sent me.

But if the Lord brings about something totally new and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them with everything that belongs to them and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with

contempt. As soon as he finished saying this, the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and all those associated with Korah together with their possessions.

They went down alive into the realm of the dead with everything they owned. The earth closed over them and they perished and were gone from the community.

At their cities, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, the earth is going to swallow us too. And the fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

The people were rejecting God by rejecting God's leader Moses. A full on story, isn't it? Consequences for consummacy.

God wants us to know that story. I wonder why. Why does he want us to know a story like that?

This swift, fierce judgment. And then the fourth of the fifth is Numbers 20. Even the great Moses faces consequences of disobedience.

Chapter 20, verse 12, Because you did not trust, this is the Lord speaking, you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give you. Do you remember what happened?

Moses was asked by God to touch, to speak to a rock and tell the rock to bring forth water. And he said with anger to the people, why do we, God and I, why do we have to do this work for you again? And he tapped the rock twice.

So he made a few mistakes. God said speak to the rock on my behalf, but Moses was proud. And Moses said, we are doing this together, I'm on a par with God, and my magic stick, I'm gonna tap it twice.

And for that disobedience, pride, he is told he will not see the promised land. He will not see the promised land. A powerful, important story that is told again and again.

So where is Christ in this portion of scripture? Well, frequently in the 10 chapters, you find Moses stepping into an intercessory role, like Numbers 16, 22.

But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and cried out, Oh God, the God who gives breath to all living things. Will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?

So every time we see in Numbers or any other part of the Torah, Moses falling down and asking God for mercy, who is that pointing to? It's pointing to Christ, isn't it? That's our task, Christ in Numbers.

And so we see the intercessory role of the great high priest. Jesus. And that reminds me of a beautiful song that we sometimes sing that reminds us of what Jesus does all the time, before the throne of God above.

Do you remember this song? Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea. A great high priest whose name is love, who ever lives and pleads for me.

My name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart, no tongue can bid me thence depart. We have one who is interceding on our behalf.

How do we relate to Israel's story in our story? Well, Numbers is all about rebellion and consequence. Do you think there are consequences for your or my rebellious disobedience in the 21st century?

It's sort of hard in a way because post the blood of Christ and the resurrection and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, we know scriptures like Romans 8.1, therefore now there is no condemnation for me, for I'm in Christ Jesus my Lord, I'm always

covered by the blood of Christ. So these passages in the Old Testament that have consequences for consummacy, consequences for rebellious disobedience.

Do we take anything from that or do we, with thanksgiving, sit under the blood of Christ and there will be no consequence? Well, I think it's an interesting question to think about.

Numbers says, the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion, yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

Are there consequences for my consummacy, my rebellion, my disobedience? I wonder if it's helpful to consider the judgment passages as descriptive for today rather than prescriptive. The grace of God in Christ covers our sin when we believe.

We are forgiven, restored to relationship with God by the grace of Jesus, by his blood.

But the consequences for poor decisions, the consequence of what happens and what amounts to rebellion against God's truth, does bear fruit in our lives, would you agree?

The consequences for consummacy, I think, still occur, but in Christ we are spared from eternal damnation for sure. And we are invited into relationship with God every day, absolutely, as we come back.

But the alcoholic who doesn't stop will reap the rewards of a sick liver and much more. The addict to whatever that is sinful will reap the pain of the cycle of addiction, though the grace of God is there to bring us out of it.

The person who refuses to forgive others will drink the poison of contempt and bitterness. So as we think about the story of numbers and what it means for us, is there an area of your life that you continue to live in consummacy?

You continue to be rebelliously disobedient. Have you ever been reading the Bible and it says, don't do this and you do that? And you're like, oh, I'm going to do another reading.

I don't like that reading. And then you open your phone up because it goes ding, and it's the same passage. Is there a consequence for our rebellion?

I think the Bible says there is, there is, but there's an antidote to our stuckness. And it's simply salvation for the sinner.

Salvation for the Sinner

Salvation for the sinner. In Numbers, it's found by looking at a bronze snake, which is so weird. The Israelites rebelled yet again in Numbers 21.

They were over the food that God was providing. And this is the story from the source. So let me read from 21, verse 4.

They traveled from Mount Hoar along the route to the Red Sea to go around Edom. So they've come up and they've gone across to what is now Jordan, and they're coming up the right side, the east side of the Jordan River.

But the people grew impatient on the way. They spoke against God and against Moses and said, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There's no bread, there's no water, and we detest this miserable food.

Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them. They bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you.

Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us. He's doing that intercessory role again. So Moses prayed for the people.

The Lord said to Moses, Make a snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole.

Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived. That's Israel's story. There is salvation for the sinner.

Where is Christ? Where is the S-O-N? Well, Jesus said he's right there.

Jesus quoted this in John 3. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Now, we have to admit, it's a strange thing they got them to do, isn't it?

It really looks like idolatry to lift up a snake. But what's the point? How does it point to Christ in Numbers?

Well, Jesus said the snake represents the curse of sin, which is placed on Christ. It's a powerful image, isn't it? The snake was cursed.

And Galatians 3 says, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole. Isn't that powerful?

They were saved by the bite on their heel of the snake. Genesis 3, protevangelium. When they look up to something that is a precursor, a primitive picture of what the Son of God will do, bearing the cross, the curse of sin on his back on the cross.

Our story. The Book of Numbers is a sorry tale. It's quite depressing when we read it about Israel's unfaithfulness.

But, you know, I think we can all agree that at times we get stuck.

We can get stuck in a rut of contumacy, of rebellion, of rebellion to the perfect teaching of Jesus, who in the Sermon on the Mount says some of those texts that I was mentioning before. Let your yes be yes. Don't look upon anyone lustfully.

Store up treasure in heaven. Don't be angry at your brother. Don't judge others.

Walk the extra mile. Give your life in service of others. Don't be proud.

Are you stuck? If you're honest with yourself, are you stuck in habits of contumacy, in rebellion? If you are, can I encourage you in Jesus' name, do what they did in Numbers, look up.

Because you find yourself as a human being in lots of different pits, don't you? And the truth that yells at us from thousands of years back is look up.

That's where you'll find help, not from a snake on a pole, but from the Lord Jesus who is ready to help. And that's why this story has been told again and again and again, the story of the people of Israel in the wilderness, needing a saviour.

It's referred to by the prophets in the Old Testament. They're wandering in the wilderness, stuck in rebellion. It's referred to by the poets of the Old Testament.

It's referred to by the stories, referred to by the apostles, the wandering in the wilderness, the judgment of God on whinging and rebellion.

That's why modern day preachers like this one talks about the story and Bible study leaders talk about it because we're meant to learn that there is grace for the rebel. Hallelujah. There is grace for the rebel.

That's why we have this story. Look up. Don't just look at your sin.

Confess your sin and receive forgiveness and then relearn habits like the story of Israel teaches us. God is holy and he wants us to be holy, so we need to learn how to be holy.

When we were in Fremantle in WA, we were in part of the city that probably had a bit of addiction issues going on. And I saw this roller shutter. It's not perfect.

It's not ideal because you'd sort of hope we could repent, rejoice and keep rejoicing. But many of us can relate to relapse, repeat, look up if you are stuck, repent and re-praise.

If you've been stuck in rebellion for a while, I bet it's a while since you've actually just praised God on your own. We stop praising God because we feel so guilty, don't we? We get stuck as rebels.

But the story we've read today in Numbers, and the whole Book of Numbers is one that says there is grace available. We need to repent and believe and obey. Repent and rejoice.

Repent and raise your voice in worship. Has anyone found that singing can stir the heart, activate the soul? Oh, my soul, bless the Lord.

All that is within me, bless his holy name.

Prayer

Lord, I know you have seen our hearts, and I do pray that for those of us who have been stuck in the recent season of our life, that today might be a beginning of looking to the one who saves, the one who restores and forgives completely.

It's only you. And because of that, because you are our worthy Saviour, you're worthy of our life, of our best, of obedience. Amen.

Israel's story is reflected in our story, isn't it? Requirements for relationship with God, consequences for contumacy, salvation for sinners. And finally, the strangest blessing is found in Numbers, isn't it?

Blessing for Belief & Obedience

You're reading the first five chapters, isn't it? It's sort of some hard stuff. And then, all of a sudden, there is this great blessing.

Numbers 6, verse 22, The Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron and his sons, This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. You know how to pray that blessing. There are blessings for belief and obedience.

Hallelujah. Yeah, we can relate to the sinner. We can, but we can also relate to the sinner who finds salvation in our gracious God through Christ.

And I hope that today, you could be encouraged that there are blessings available for you. Can I ask you, do you believe that God wants to bless you more than punish you? He does.

He wants to bless. His face is inclined towards you. Do you believe that God wants to bless generations after you, either through physical children or spiritual children?

He does. He wants to. Do you know that God's face is for you?

He's looking at you like the child who says, look at me, Dad, look at me, Dad. He's always watching. Hallelujah.

He's watching because his face is towards you. May he be gracious unto you and give you peace.