

The Weekly Word

August 5-11, 2013

The Book of Numbers continues to surprise me with its message and application to my life. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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Monday, August 5: Numbers 7– treating others as God’s dwelling...

The Levites who were responsible for care and moving of the Tabernacle were given carts and oxen to carry the Tabernacle parts as they moved from the desert to the Promised Land. That is all of the Levites except the Kohathites. According to verse 9 *Moses did not give any [oxen or carts] to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible* (9). Why I wondered? Because they were responsible for carrying the sacred holy and most holy articles of the Tabernacle?

I had to think about this for a while. Why was God making this distinction? It seems that sacred things are handled in a special way.

God, where does this touch me? We don’t have a tabernacle/temple anymore?

The NT says that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19) and the church is God’s temple (1Cor 3:16). Hmmm...

God seems to be whispering to me that brothers and sisters who bear the image of God and have the Spirit within them should be handled in a special way. As I think through the NT I have read over the years, I remember admonitions to treat others with kindness, gentleness, bearing with and forgiving them. The fruit of the Spirit tumbled in my thoughts...treat others with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

Then there is the church, the body of the Christ indwelt with the Spirit of God. I must treat her specially as well. I must be careful to carry her with my hands, not load her into a cart. I need to see that she is preserved not destroyed, cared for not damaged...

And so my meditations whirled as I pondered the Kohathites carrying sacred things rather than transporting them in carts.

Lord, thank You for Your body, the Church, and for sisters and brothers of the church. I hear You calling me to honor and care for them And to be careful as I ‘handle’ them. Lord, may I honor You as I honor and care for them. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, August 6: Numbers 8–Setting apart...

I found myself thinking about the rituals used to set apart the Levites, the washing and shaving, the offerings and the ceremony. After a while I found myself thinking about being ‘set apart’, what it must have been like for the Levites to be set apart and all that it entailed. What an incredibly special event. And from that day forward they belonged to the Lord and literally worked for Him in that work of the Tabernacle.

As I began to ponder what connection all this had to me and what word from the Lord there was for me today, I connected the ‘setting apart ritual’ of the Levites to baptism. In baptism we are set apart for the Lord. We are ‘washed’ clean. We die to self and are raised with Christ. We are owned by God and are set apart for His work in the world.

The symbolism connections were fascinating.

I began to ask myself, am I laboring for the Lord? Am I dedicated to Him and His work in the world... reaching the nations with the love and gospel of Christ?

Am I? Are you?

Ponder this...

Lord, may Your name be proclaimed great in all the world and may I labor to that end all the days of my life. Lord God --Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit-- great is Your name and most worthy to be praised. Praise of You is more than words of my lips, it is the work of my hands, the thoughts of my mind, the drive of my heart. Oh, Lord, may all of these be bent on praising You. Alleluia. Amen

Wednesday, August 7: Numbers 9– Check with the Lord...

Immediately upon reading I knew my devotional time would be spent camped around verse 8. Some people who were ritually unclean needed a ruling about the Passover, so they came to Moses for his decision. *Moses answered them, "Wait until I find out what the LORD commands concerning you."*

As I sit and ponder Moses' response, I find so much wisdom. People come to me with all manner of urgency with particular faith questions. Sometimes the answer is plain and I can give it. Often, however, the question is a new situation I haven't considered or one I am not immediately sure of the answer. Moses was in this latter situation. The issue hadn't come up and Moses was unsure of the answer, rather than blather on, he said, *Wait until I find out what the LORD commands...*

Brilliant!... What does God have to say on the matter!

Too often in life I speed along guessing what God might say on a new issue or new question I haven't faced. Too often I accept the other person's urgency or my own urgency on a particular topic rather than pausing to talk with the Lord.

Although the text isn't clear on the ensuing timeline, it seems like Moses got his answer from the Lord in a short time. Maybe by the next day Moses was able to meet with the people and give them God's answer. Truth is, whether it was a day or a week, the answer born out of consultation and communication with the Lord came in a timely manner.

And by consulting with the Lord first, Moses avoided a mistake and/or embarrassment. (If you want to see what can happen if we answer without seeking God's input, skip ahead and read the paragraphs leading up to Joshua 9:14.)

Lord, I pray for patience and wisdom to know those times when I should not rush ahead with an answer but should wait so that I have time to check in and consult with You. I mean, Lord, this is such practical advice, it seems I should know it. And yet I know that sometimes I rush ahead. Forgive me and help me to be more attuned to Your whispers and nudges to slow down and check in.

And, Lord, I pray that I am more attuned to You in my life generally, not just when surprise questions or decisions come my way. I pray this through Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

Thursday, August 8: Numbers 10– Always a struggle within...

Today we read about Israel setting out on their trek to the Promised Land. The Lord God has taken a year to give them his law, established the Tabernacle and everything that goes with it, and to teach them the ways of His community. It is a great day!

The Lord God Himself will lead them through the pillar of fire by night and smoke by day. When the pillar lifts, they go, when it stays, they stay and where it leads, they follow.

God will lead them, that's the essence of the story.

Then I come to verses 29-32, Moses pleaded with his father-in-law to come with them. I was surprised by some of the things Moses said.

Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel." He answered, "No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people." But Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes. If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the LORD gives us."

Is it only me or did you hear it as well?

Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes. ..."

Was Moses really asking father-in-law to be a safety back up plan? It surely sounds that way to me. "Dad, please come with us, you know the desert. You will know where we should camp. ... I mean, you know, just in case God doesn't know..."

It sure sounds to me like the great Moses is making sure he has a back up plan just in case God needs some help!!

This little exchange launched my thinking about how I do the same thing. How I trust God, but make sure I have a back up plan just in case. And it hit me, is that really trusting God?

Something for me to meditate upon on this mid-week Thursday...

Lord, do I really and truly trust You with my life? With my families lives? Do I? I want to, God. I long to really and truly trust You, but it is a struggle, a struggle within to let go and trust You.

I love You. I plead for strength to trust and follow You alone. No hesitations. No Holding back. Amen.

Friday, August 9: Numbers 11– Danger of negative talk...

If you have ever worked with a group of people, at work, in your community, neighborhood or even in your family, few things can turn the situation sour like disgruntled people. Negative talk, whining and complaining is infectious and deadly. It sucks the life out of a group!

Israel began experiencing this phenomenon shortly after breaking camp and resuming their journey to the Promised Land.

In Numbers 11 Moses records the 'wildfire' of discontent spreading among the people. *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused.* God was not about to suffer with fools like this so God gave a warning. *Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.* All of this takes place in the first verse!

Seed of discontent might have been partially squashed, but they still smoldered.

A couple of verses later Moses tells us that *The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"* (4-6).

This is even more insidious. In the first case people complained to the Lord directly. Now the sense of the story is that the "rabble" have gone underground. They are jabbering in quiet one-on-one sessions or in smaller groups creating discontent with their inciting and inaccurate talk.

I found myself pondering how debilitating negative talk can be on a group or family.

The text didn't lead me to any solutions. Unlike God, I cannot effect a natural disaster or bird migration pattern. But I can learn from this lesson and ask myself if I engage in debilitating chatter in the groups that I am in...

Lord, especially during the hardest tasks and most difficult times, show me how to be a positive force for good and for You. Help me to be a person who builds up not tears down. Help me be a person who talks things through openly with truth, rather than incites from the shadows. Help me to honor You, Oh Lord, by my manner of living in addition to the words of my mouth.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Saturday, August 10: Numbers 12– Jealousy and bigotry raise there ugly heads!...

I sat in bewilderment before the text listening to bigotry and jealousy spew its venom.

I am regularly tempted to believe that somehow we Americans invented bigotry and racial discrimination because so heinous was the slavery issue and our treatment of Native Americans in our history. But that is not the case. Here is an example thousands of years before Jesus.

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite (1). Cushites were black Africans. When the writer of Ecclesiastes said that there was 'nothing new under the sun' (Ecc. 1:9) sin is included in that statement.

To make matters worse from the platform of bigotry, Aaron and Miriam climb into the heights of jealousy, pride and the desire for recognition. *"Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?"*(2).

The Lord heard them and dealt with this insurrection swiftly.

Reading all this I had to admit that I carry those same sin-marks in my life. As much as I hate to admit it, bigotry lives in me. I try to curb it and monitor it, but it is there.

Oh, God, forgive me when for racial and ethnic or economic or education reasons I think less of other people, the people You have created in Your image! Oh, Lord, forgive me.

And jealousy, pride and the desire for recognition, they are there too! Ouch, today's reading hurts. I want people in my work-group to know it was **MY** idea. I look at nicer homes and stature/prestige/job of others and quietly wish that was me!

Oh, God, forgive me. Sin lives in the bowels of my life. Sometimes it just erupts in thoughts or subtle comments. Forgive me again, Lord. Forgive me when jealousy, envy, and their cousins boil in my life.

Lord, I am sin filled. I beg You, please forgive me and lead me to the quiet waters of contentment and satisfaction in the life You have given me to live. Through my Lord Jesus, I pray. Amen

Sunday, August 11, 2013, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

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