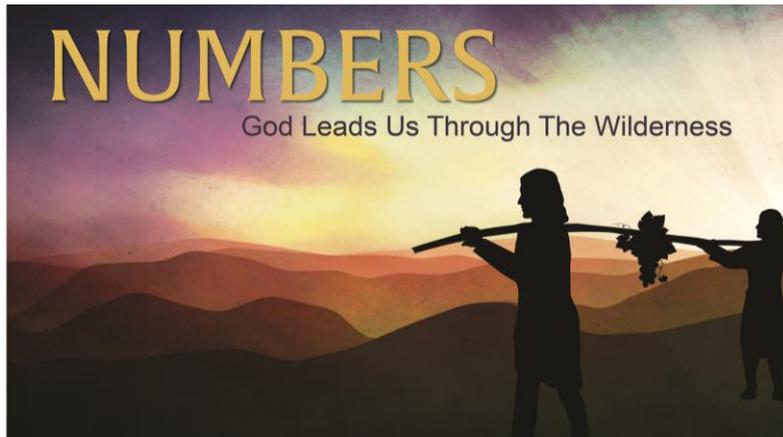


God Inspires Our Purity and Praise

Fall Sermon Series on Numbers
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
September 18, 2016

TEXT: Numbers 5:1-10; 6:22-27; 7:1-2, 84-88

We continue this morning in our fall series on the Book of Numbers. If you are just joining us, let me remind you that Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible, and it narrates the portion of



God's great story for the world between Mount Sinai and entering the Promised Land. It is the wilderness period. It is an expedition. It is a season of life where we confront our fears, where we meet God's faithfulness in the wilderness. God's people enter the wilderness as children and move out as sons and

daughters of the King prepared for their inheritance. The first section of Numbers deals with getting organized in the camp before the trip begins, which is just good common practice. For any epic trip into the wilderness, you want to have a period of preparation. You don't want to end up in the middle of the Grand Canyon with the question: "Did *you* bring the water?" "Were *you* bringing the water?" So the first nine chapters of Numbers deals with the organization of

God's people in the wilderness before the journey begins. We are close to the end of the preparation. Most people feel ready for the wilderness before they actually are, so we are following God's Word and getting ready, if you will, in the wilderness before the trip begins. Remember that this whole portion of God's Word takes place in the wilderness of Sinai, that great triangle-shaped piece of land in-between the Exodus from Egypt and claiming the Promised Land. At the base of the triangle is the Mountain of God, and God's people have reached this



place in Exodus 19 and remain there through the rest of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and the first 10 chapters of Numbers before coming up the other side. So, this is the setting. It is not a satellite view that they had. The view they had was from the base of the mountain looking up at the

fiery glory of God speaking to the people from the top of the mountain and God's people encamped in a vast array of the base. This is the scene that we must hold in view.



As we move in closer, we remember what this must have been like. They saw God's visible glory in the midst of the camp, the sure sign of His presence with a cloud and a fiery pillar that signaled that



God actually dwelt among the people. The tabernacle, and later the temple—and I would submit you this morning that the church is the continuity of this institution, if you will,—is the place of God's presence. God is here. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor said: “When Christ is preached, then Jesus walks in the midst of the congregation,” and I believe that with all my heart. He is speaking to us, and when we gather for worship, He meets with us and delights in our praise and now speaks to us from His Words. These are not my words, but they are my attempt to explain to you God's Words, the voice of your heavenly Father speaking.

Numbers chapters 5, 6, and 7 is the portion we are crossing over today. Numbers 7 is the longest chapter in the Pentateuch, and we are going to cover that in a short space. It has a lot of repetition for its own reason, which we will talk about. But Numbers 5, 6, and 7 deal with after the camp is organized and arrayed in battle formation, and the Lord tells us that His presence among us calls forth two basic responses. This is true in Numbers, and this is true for all of us: If God really lives in the middle of our lives, if God encamps in the center, then that inspires both our purity and our praise. God's holy presence among us requires that we act in holiness, and God makes provision for that, as we will see. God's presence among us blesses us and then calls forth the response of praise. We want to look at Numbers 5, 6, and 7 this morning. Keep your Bible open. It's an astonishing privilege to have a copy of the Bible. If you think of the number of people who lost their lives so that you could read the Bible in your own language, and even have a copy printed, keep it open and delight in it. It's amazing that we have God's Word!

So what does God say? Numbers 5:1 begins yet again this refrain that we see over 400 times in the Bible:

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

That is not a throwaway line. It is God speaking again. This is what He desires to instruct us, and the command in Numbers 5:2 begins:

“Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead.”

Now, remember that this putting out of the camp is a temporary separation, and the main point of Numbers 5:2 is that when you are suffering from disease, or if in some way your body is coming apart in some way, you have a sickness or a flow, you have been in touch with the dead, then you are removed temporarily from the place of God's dwelling. This is because God is associated with life, and everything around God is alive, even His throne. When we see it, it is made of living creatures. When we see the Lord of glory in Revelation, everything is living, and in the camp in the wilderness, God instructs His people in this ongoing visual aid of what it means to be near the living God. It means that He is the source of life and that if you been in touch with death, then you can't be close to God. This doesn't mean that everyone who gets sick gets left behind in the wilderness. It is important to remember that there is provision for a ritual bath. People are separated for a period of days and then come back into the camp. It is a temporary separation. This is true in Numbers 5:3:

“You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell.”

The point is stated clearly: that they would not defile the camp, because “I am in the midst of the camp,” the Lord says. The Lord is the Author of life. Nothing that is connected with death is close to the camp of the living God. More profoundly in many ways to me is what the Lord says next. It might be easy to see death in disease or sickness, but the real source of death in Scripture is disobedience to God. The real wrong in the universe is the moral evil in the universe. The opening chapters of the Bible communicate that good and evil are not abstract things, but that they exist in relation to the revealed will of God: that which is good is obedience to God, and that which is evil is disobedience to God. The Lord moves in Numbers 5:6 to say that when a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit, that is what necessitates a response. The heart of this wilderness encampment with God dwelling in the midst of us is that we have a God who is holy and righteous and who demands righteousness and holiness from his people: “Be holy as I am holy,” says the Lord. The Lord makes provision for restitution when we sin. That sin must be atoned for. When you think about this camp, that it is going to be moving; it is going to be mobile; it is going to be journeying through the wilderness, we have to constantly remember that God is visibly dwelling in the center of the camp and the point is that His holiness is radiating out. There is a constant provision in the center of the camp for forgiveness of sins. We need to follow this closely. Often times when we sin, we think our sin is so unique. We think: “Oh, if you just only knew the attendant circumstances.” “If you only knew the pressure that I had for this exam, of course I had to cut

some corners.” “If you knew what I was facing economically in providing for my family, you'd know why I had to fudge on the taxes. We have to have a good family vacation or we just don't thrive as a family.” We often heap on top all the reasons why we do what we do, the Lord says in Numbers 5:6:

“When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit, . . .”

We tend to rate other people's sins as the really serious ones. Maybe you struggle with gossip, strife, or malice. There are some long lists of sin in the Bible. Early Christians reflecting on sin came up with a master list. The 'Desert Fathers' were the first ones to come up with a master list of sins, and they make it a list of seven: pride is given, pride of place; greed; lust; envy; gluttony; anger; and sloth, or laziness. The Bible doesn't give an exhaustive catalog of sin. Numbers 5:2 simply says: “You are going to sin,” and whenever you sin, of all the sin that people do, just find out where your problem is. I know what mine are, and notice that in the Scripture, in Numbers 5:6b, the very profound piece of this verse is that all sin is interpreted as:

“ . . . by breaking faith with the LORD,”

When we sin, what we are really doing is breaking faith with God. When you steal, it is truly an indictment of God's commitment to provide and meet your needs. When we take something that doesn't belong to us, a person or a thing, it is an indictment that: “God, You have not provided for me.” When we worship other things above God, it is an indictment that: “God, You are insufficient. You have not supplied me with the joy that I need. My happiness really lies elsewhere.” When we covet something that doesn't belong to us, it is an indictment of God as the covenant-keeper and provider. However this manifests itself in our lives, the Bible sees it as a breaking faith with God. What happens as a result in Numbers 5:6c is that we become guilty:

“ . . . and that person realizes his guilt,”

Guilt is one of those words in the postmodern world that we want to get rid of, and yet guilt is essential for our humanity made in God's image, just like pain. Pain is really a gift. The reason leprosy hurts you so much is that you don't feel pain and so you can be closing your hand in the car door and you are not going to be feel anything, even though you are damaging yourself. Pain is a signal that something is wrong. How many times we say: “I felt just a little pain,” and that prompts us to go to the doctor and we discover that something really serious is going wrong. You praise God for that pain. As I was growing up, my parents were hippies and guilt was out. We just weren't into it. It never came up around the dining room table, and it was a later discovery for me in life that guilt is actually wonderful. It's a wonderful thing, because guilt is a softening of the heart, a tenderizing of the conscience. It says: “Something has come between me and my heavenly Father, and when I feel that, I want to respond, and so should you.

What do you do with your guilt in Scripture? You do what only the God of the Bible makes possible. He tells us in Numbers 5:7 that when that happens:

“. . . he shall confess his sin that he has committed.”

So, when you sin, which you will, which I will, then we confess it. Our temptation is to hide it or deny it or to suppress it and hold onto it and say: “You see, I did that because of this reason,” or “It’s not that big of deal.” Or, we might think: “What’s really big deal is what *you’ve* done.” You know what happens when you hold onto your sin? David had this experience of holding onto it, and he wrote about it in Psalm 32. David says in Psalm 32:3:

“For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.”

If you hold onto your sin and your guilt, then you will rot yourself out on the inside. Consider the desirability of that. David says in Psalm 32:4:

“For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.”

Yet something remarkable happens in obedience to Numbers 5:7. David says in Psalm 32:5:

“I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’”

Guess what he found when he did that. David said in Psalm 32:5b:

“. . .and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

I confess to the Lord: “I have sinned against You. I have broken faith with You!” David had done this in some very big ways, and he confessed it to the Lord, and he found forgiveness. David goes on to say to all of us who read his poem, in Psalm 32:8:

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.”

He says in Psalm 32:9, if we don’t do this:

“Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding.”

But, if we confess our sins to the Lord, the Psalm ends with blessing and rejoicing. David’s son Solomon writes in Proverbs 28:13:

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

James 5:16 says:

“Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

In 1 John 1:9-10, we read:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.”

So Numbers 5, 6, and 7 tell us God knows we will sin. He makes provision by saying to confess your sin. Numbers 5:7 goes on to add that we don't just confess our sin to God and say: “That’s great, we’re done.” Numbers 5:7 commands that if we have wronged someone:

“And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong.”

To the degree that it's possible, we make restitution, and restitution in Scripture involves adding a fifth to it, a percentage of the damage done. So, if I am not paying attention and I'm driving through my neighborhood and I wipe out your mailbox and all of your shrubbery and your landscaping that you to spent a thousand dollars on, then the right thing to do is first to go to God and say: “God, forgive me for being an idiot and damaging my neighbor's property.” Then, go knock on your neighbor's door and say: “How much did you just pay on that landscaping? A thousand dollars? Okay, here's the thousand dollars to redo it and here's an extra \$200 gift card to Lowe’s just for the trouble and time.” That's the biblical vision. You make restitution and you add value because you did damage. It's a beautiful picture of what reconciliation between people really looks like. It's a profound vision of saying whatever we do that's wrong, it's against God, and yet we act towards each other, and sometimes the damage that we do to one another is very concrete and real. If restitution cannot be made to the one wronged and there is no next of kin, then ultimately the gift is brought to the sanctuary. Tucked underneath, in the bottom of Numbers 5:8, we see the line that all of this action, the confession of sin, the restitution, takes place in addition to the ram of atonement which is offered. At the heart of Israel's worship then is atonement for sin and a life of purity in God's presence. No other people on the planet have this vision of God dwelling in the midst of the people and making provision for atonement. In God's wise providence, in His plan and purpose, this whole encampment in the wilderness prepares our hearts to see and recognize that atonement for sin will be provided, that God will cover our sins, and we will see this climactically in the sacrifice of our Lord many, many centuries later. At the heart of the encampment is God's visible glory, His presence, and His blessing. The rest of Numbers 5 describes a particular situation which I wish we could look at in length today, but it's a situation where there's a conflict in a marriage situation and a husband is concerned about infidelity. The Lord provides a gracious way to prevent a husband's rage from being released without cause and allows God to be the judge of the hidden sin. I encourage you to read the small group study on this portion.

We want to move together to Numbers 6 which describes what happens when God is in the midst of the people, when forgiveness is offered, and when His holy presence is at the center of

the camp. What happens in the end of Numbers 6 is this staggering blessing that is given to God's people. The Lord speaks again to Moses, to Aaron and his sons, and commands what is called the 'priestly blessing.' This portion of Scripture is poetic. It is one of the oldest portions of God's Word. The priestly blessing has a beautiful rhythm to it, a rising crescendo, in three lines. A rising crescendo in Hebrew is three words, then five words, then seven words. The proportion of syllables increases with each line: 12, 14, 16. Even the number of letters rises in a very rhythmic way: 15, 20, 25. This blessing that God gives forms the conclusion of the temple service. This blessing forms the conclusion of the synagogue service today. In its original setting, this beautiful and profound blessing is really three lines of describing God's movement to us as His people, and the result of His presence in our lives is beautiful. You need this, and I need this. The opening line in Numbers 6:24 says:

"The LORD bless you and keep you;"

The Lord's movement towards us in this opening line is that God comes in the radiance of His holiness moving towards us with blessing for our good, and the result of God's presence among us keeps us. It holds us. It preserves us. It protects us. It is like what Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, that the Lord would protect us, keep us from falling into the power of temptation. This language is echoed throughout the Psalms. It is echoed in the closing blessing of the short letter of Jude in the New Testament: *"The Lord is able to keep you from falling."* You need God's presence. Isn't it awesome to have someone powerful and strong next to you, to hold you, and to keep you from falling? That's the image that God's movement is towards us with blessing and that He is going to preserve, protect us keep us from stumbling. The second line rises to say in Numbers 6:25:

"The LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;"

This is the shining radiance of God's face. Don't ignore the anthropomorphic image of God, the living God, of His face, the radiance of His face, His presence shining upon us. It's a very concrete image. What happens when the light of the glory of the living God shines upon you? In this blessing, the radiance of His presence has the effect of grace in our lives. Sometimes we are afraid to come into the holy presence of God, the light of God's presence, fearing what we might find. Yet, this blessing says that in light of God's glory shining upon us, the outcome is God's grace upon us.

The climactic line of this blessing is in Numbers 6:26:

"The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

"Shalom" The image of Numbers 6:26, the third climactic line of the priestly blessing, is that God would lift up His countenance, that He would notice you, that He would notice me, that He would in a sense pay attention to you. I have absolutely no idea how the sovereign King of the

universe runs the Kingdom that He does every day. I am astonished on almost a daily basis at how God can move His people around the planet, how He can coordinate our past and make it line up with what we need for our future. How do you do that? Sometimes in this fast-paced modern world we often find our lives fragmented. We often find ourselves alone, and yet Numbers 6:26, the climax of the priestly blessing, says that the living God notices you, that our lives are lived with God's attentive gaze, that He lifts up His countenance, and the result of that banishes anxiety from our hearts. The result of God's seeing you, God's noticing you, is His peace. Peace, *shalom*, in the Bible is not just the absence of war. *Shalom* is a broad, expansive word that means well-being. It means health. It means to be at rest. It means to be without fear. Remember that one of the offerings given daily in the sanctuary is the fellowship offering, *shelamim*, the peace offering, fellowship with God and His creation: *"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you, be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."* We need these words because they are not just words. It's a threefold repetition of God's name. As for the ending of the blessing, the Lord says in Numbers 6:27:

"So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

The high priest wears God's name on his forehead, and he places God's name on us. I love to give the benediction. In Latin that means *"good word."* I love the ending of the service, the privilege it is to me just to pray a blessing. I take that really seriously, and I am counting that God is hearing those words and that He is really going to go with you and bless you, that something happens in this hour together that can keep us going all week. We need His presence. We need His name.

The importance of the priestly blessing is attested throughout the rest of the Bible. It is echoed throughout the blessings in the New Testament, and this portion of God's Word also has the great and noble distinction of being the earliest piece of the Bible that we have. A series of excavations were done in Israel in the *Ketef Hinnom* area in the late 70s and early 90s. As part of these excavations, archaeologists discovered a set of tombs from the first temple period, about the seventh century BC. One of these tombs was intact. The problem with tombs in antiquity is that there are usually valuable things in the tombs. People look for them and steal them, and then they have to follow Numbers 5, confess their sins and make restitution. It's wonderful when you find tomb intact. They found one of these tombs intact, and there were over a thousand objects in this tomb. The greatest ones were two, small, about half the size of a cigarette, rolled-up pieces of silver. They were very, very small. The largest one is 97 mm x 27 mm. They unrolled it, and it was 18 lines of writing written in the ancient Hebrew letters. It took a while, a few lasers: *"What are these letters?"* When they finally could read the letters, you know what it says? It says: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon*

just have empty trays and say: "Sorry, were just symbolizing that we have fellowship with God"? Numbers 7 describes this deep commitment of the people in response: It's a commitment to serving, as we see as the camp moved; it's a commitment to being there physically, your presence; and it's a commitment to offer our gifts in response. As the shared gift of each tribal group is narrated, Numbers 7:84-88 ends with the summary total. It is a pretty massive gift in the end. The Lord says:

"This was the dedication offering for the altar on the day when it was anointed, from the chiefs of Israel: twelve silver plates, twelve silver basins, twelve golden dishes, each silver plate weighing 130 shekels and each basin 70, all the silver of the vessels 2,400 shekels according to the shekel of the sanctuary, the twelve golden dishes, full of incense, weighing 10 shekels apiece according to the shekel of the sanctuary, all the gold of the dishes being 120 shekels; all the cattle for the burnt offering twelve bulls, twelve rams, twelve male lambs a year old, with their grain offering; and twelve male goats for a sin offering; and all the cattle for the sacrifice of peace offerings twenty-four bulls, the rams sixty, the male goats sixty, the male lambs a year old sixty."

That's a huge offering. It is required, but it is bigger than any one person could ever offer.

We have our annual meeting today and I encourage you to stay. It's really a neat thing for God's people to meet and make decisions, and we commit ourselves to the ministry year ahead. This includes more outreach to the community, of really living as this mobile place of God's dwelling. We are in the middle of this journey, in between the covenant-making at Sinai and the full inheritance in the Promised Land. The reality is that the life of a Christian, the life of the church, is this wilderness journey. That's the portion we are on, and we need everyone involved for ministry to happen. Numbers 5-7 is a beautiful portion of God's Word. **His presence among us inspires our purity; He has committed Himself to you and to me with blessing;** and it is right that **we commit ourselves in response to Him with our worship, with our presence, and our consecrated giving.** Will you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, we delight in You. Thank You that all of Your Word is inspired. We thank You, Lord, that You teach us step-by-step of what it means to be Your people. Lord, we thank You that You saved us first when we didn't deserve it, and then You told us how to live. We thank You that You are patient with us in instructing us. We thank You, Lord, that You are the God of life and that You show us very concretely that death has no place nearby You. I pray, Father, that You would move the death that comes about from sin far from us. I pray, Father, for some of us whose bones are rotting this morning because we have sin in our lives that we just don't know what to do with. I pray, Father, that You would help us to confess that to You, for all sin is a break in faith with You, and help us go further, Lord, where we need to do that and seek out

our brother or sister and say, "I have wronged you. How can I make it right?" Help us to remember to add a portion. Lord, I pray that You would help us today to commit ourselves in response to You even as You have committed Yourself to us. I pray that you would make us a faithful people, that we would learn lessons over time together, that Your truth would prevail over our unbelief, that You would help us to grow in faith, even today. Help us, Lord, to grasp the heights of Your plans that You have for us, and help us to walk together in faithfulness, following Your lead. Build Your church, Lord, here at Kenwood, in our city, and in our world around Your holy presence, that the earth might one day be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.