

## Blended Week 9

February 22: Numbers 7 and Mark 4:21-41

There is a lot of repetition in Numbers 7. We see that all the tribal representatives bring the same offerings to the tabernacle. This shows that all the tribal leaders had an equal role in religious practices. No tribe had more of a share in the religious practices and no tribe had less responsibility. The same is true today. Believers are all equals in the sight of God. There is no hierarchy, we all unite under the banner of Christ. Our chief end is to worship God and enjoy Him abundantly. My prayer is that we all go into the world with a spirit of worship and that we give ourselves over completely to The LORD acting as living sacrifices for Him.

In Mark, Jesus continues to use more parables. He compares the kingdom of God to a field that had been planted. The farmer sowed the seed, but after that, he does not do anything else. Instead, he wakes up and goes to bed and the crop grows. God does the work of producing the crop. We simply sew the seed.

We also read about when they are crossing the Sea of Galilee. A storm comes up and they are all terrified. The boat is rocking all over the place, it is swamped. The disciples are worried they are going to sink. During this time of distress, they find Jesus sleeping in the stern. They wake Him and He calms the sea by telling it to be still and silent. As believers, we can rest in the fact that God has it all under control. Life comes at us fast and sometimes things go wrong from our perspective. This is nothing that God cannot get us through. We can relax and let God do the work. In the bitter storms of life, we can take a nap and relax, God is greater than any problem we might come up against.

February 23: Numbers 8-19 and Mark 5:1-20

The Levites are consecrated. Then the people celebrate the second Passover. They followed the Passover instructions to the letter. Unfortunately, there were some people that had been defiled by a corpse and were unable to celebrate the Passover. God makes provision for them and anyone else defiled or unable to celebrate due to traveling. They are to celebrate the Passover in the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight. God even makes a provision for foreigners among them that want to observe the Passover. This shows us that very early on, God is inclusive. The Israelites were holy and set apart from the other nations, but that was supposed to be an example for the other nations as to how a holy and set apart people interacted with the Most High God. It was not meant to keep people away, instead it was meant to show people The Way.

God gives instructions on how to assemble the people by giving blasts from the trumpets. There were thousands of people in the camp, so developing these signals made sense. It kept everyone abreast of what was happening. Similar practices are used today. On the ships I served on, there were a variety of different sounds that would be played over the 1MC to keep the crew in the loop.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus comes across a man that is tormented by many demons. When Jesus asks the name, the demon responds that it is "Legion because we are many." The demons did not want to be sent out of the region. They beg Jesus to let them enter a herd of pigs on a nearby hillside. Jesus allows them to enter the pigs and they promptly run down the steep bank and drown in the sea. The fact that it was a herd of pigs shows us that this happened in a Gentile region. The man that was tormented is healed, but the people in the area are not happy about it for one reason. They have lost a lot of money because of the dead pigs. They wanted Jesus out of there because they were afraid of lost revenue. I think the same thing happens today. Sin sells and the manufacturers of vices don't want people to turn to Jesus lest they lose business. They do not care about harming the people, the concern is more about profit. God loves you more than anything in this world ever will. Don't believe the lies of the world.

February 24: Numbers 11-13 and Mark 5: 21-43

The Israelites become restless. They are upset that they only have Manna to eat. They whine and complain about not having anything but manna. There is no meat. They then go so far as to say that back when they lived in Egypt, they enjoyed fish and a variety of vegetables for "free". That food was not free. They were slaves! Yet now, in their freedom, they crave oppression because at least their bellies were full with a variety of things. God is stirred to anger. Moses is stirred to anger as well. God has 70 men appointed to help Moses out and then He sends so much quail that there was three feet of quail in all directions for a day's journey (about 25 miles). The people that ate the meat became sick. The natural cause was most likely food poisoning since the meat was left out in the open.

Miriam and Aaron cause problems and bring an insurrection against Moses. They think that Moses is no different than them. Miriam breaks out in a disease. Rather than tell Miriam that she got what she deserved, Moses interceded on her behalf, asking God to heal her. God grants Moses's request. Miriam is then sent out of the camp for seven days.

Moses sends scouts into the land flowing with milk and honey. The scouts bring back a report of giants in the land. They invoke fear in the people, telling them how big their enemy is. Only one of the scouts, Caleb, had the faith to quiet the people. He tells them that they should go and take possession of the land so that they can conquer it. Caleb knew that the enemy stood no chance against them, not because of their physical prowess or might, but because God would give them the victory. In a world full of fear and problems, be like Caleb. Remember that God is bigger than anything this world can throw at you. He is our victory. Our God is so strong and mighty, there is nothing He cannot do.

In the New Testament reading, we read more of Jesus's healing. A crowd presses on every side of Jesus, but a woman that has been suffering from bleeding for a long time touches His robe and is healed. Jesus feels power go out of Him the moment she touches His robe. When Christ asks who touched Him, the disciples all say that there is such a crowd that everyone is touching Him. The healed woman makes her presence known and Christ sends her on her way, stating that her faith has made her well. Then Christ goes to heal a girl that had died. Jesus sends the people away, stating that the girl is not dead, but merely asleep. He commands her to get up. The 12

year old girl gets up and walks around. Jesus then tells them to feed her and not tell anyone about what they had witnessed.

February 25: Numbers 14-15 and Mark 6:1-32

The people hear the report about how large the people are in the Promised Land and lose heart. They moan and complain, stating that they should never have left Egypt. Despite Caleb and Joshua telling them that the land is good, the people would not advance. The LORD is frustrated with them. They have forgotten all of the wonderful things that He had done for them up to this point. God had been faithful to them, but they had not been faithful to Him. So, God sends them in a different direction. At this, the people decide that maybe they have made a mistake and they should turn back. However, that will lead to ruin. God has ordered them to go in this direction. If they go against His way, it will not succeed. Moses warned them, but they still go and are then routed by Amalekites and Canaanites. The irony here is that they were afraid when they had God's blessing to go up against them. Surely they would have succeeded if they had gone when God had ordained it. Now that He has withdrawn His promise of victory, they suddenly become brave and it leads to destruction. What lesson can we learn from them?

In the New Testament reading, Jesus has returned home. The people listen to Him at the synagogue, but then become cynical. They know Jesus as the son of Joseph. Since they have watched Him grow up, they have a hard time accepting His authority. J Vernon McGee hypothesizes that it was probably harder for people to believe Jesus as the Son of God when He was walking on earth because they could physically see Him. They knew His habits and other "human" attributes, which would have made it difficult for some to come to know Him as Lord.

We also learn about John the Baptist's fate. He was beheaded for telling the truth. Herod did not like the fact that John was calling him out for having a relationship with his brother's wife. John stood boldly for the truth and it cost him his life. My hope and prayer is that we will boldly proclaim the truth regardless of opposition.

February 26: Numbers 16-17 and Mark 6:33-56

There is rebellion in the camp. Korah leads a group against Moses and his authority. The way that he sees it, everyone in the community is holy, not just Moses. To a degree, he has a point. The fact is that the entire community was set apart. However, no one else in the camp enjoyed the same level of communication with God that Moses did. Korah did not want to recognize that so he bucked against The LORD. This rebellion caused the earth to open up and swallow all of Korah's people and their possessions.

Staffs from the twelve tribes are brought to the tent of the testimony. God shows that He has chosen Aaron and his line to be priests in the fact that the staff sprouted, formed buds, and produced almonds. Aaron's staff is placed in front of the testimony to remind people who He has appointed.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus and His disciples had tried to get away from it all. Yesterday, we closed with the reading that they had gone away from the crowd. It is good to get away and spend quality time with God. Jesus made it a priority and we should as well.

The peace and time of reflection they were seeking did not last long. A large crowd comes in. Rather than telling them to go away, Jesus starts to minister to them, teaching them about the ways of the Father. After a while, the disciples realize that the crowd does not have anything to eat, so they ask Jesus to send them to a nearby village to buy food. Jesus tells them to feed the crowd. With five loaves of bread about the size of a twinkie and two fish, they feed 5,000 people and have leftovers. We read Matthew's account of Christ walking on water and the healings that Jesus performs at Gennesaret.

February 27: Numbers 18-20 and Mark 7:1-13

God gives Aaron instructions about the priesthood. One thing that sticks out to me is that He says that they are responsible for sin against the priesthood. They are responsible for doing what is right when it comes to the priesthood. If they mess it up, they are the guilty party. God also gives instructions for the purification ritual. I know a lot of these regulations might seem excessive, but they are communicating their (our) need to be purified. They are unable to make themselves pure, so they put their guilt and shame on the red cow that is then sacrificed and burned up. God expects holiness of His people. He expects us to be pure. Thankfully, He sent us His Son Jesus to atone for our sins. Unlike the cow that just covered up the sins and impurities, the blood of Jesus wipes it away, like it never even happened.

The people become upset because they do not have any water. In their typical fashion, they gather up against Moses and Aaron. When Moses and Aaron go to the tent of meeting God tells them to assemble the people and water will be provided from the rock. The people do as they are told. Moses responds in an atypical way. This time he asks "must we bring water out of this rock for you?". Moses made a terrible mistake. He was equating himself with The LORD. The power to draw water from the rock was not from Moses, it was from God, but rather than give God the glory, Moses gives glory to himself. As a result, Moses will not be able to enter the Promised Land.

As they travel, they get to Edomite territory and try to pass through. The Edomites deny their request. It is worth noting that the Edomites are descended from Esau, Jacob's older brother who was swindled out of his blessing and sold his birthright for some stew. As time goes on, there will be more bitterness between the Israelites and Edomites.

In the New Testament reading, Pharisees and some of their scribes are worried about the cleanliness of the disciples since they were eating bread with unwashed hands. We should wash our hands before eating. However, our standard of washing today would not be up to snuff with the Pharisees and their ritual hand washing. Jesus points out that they are worried about the outward signs of purity, but they are not worried about what is inside.

If the inside is cleaned out by the Holy Spirit, then there will be outward signs. Looking nice and shiny on the outside, but corruption on the inside will not save us.

February 28: Numbers 21-22 and Mark 7:14-37

Arad, the Canaanite king, rises up to fight against the Israelites as they travel. The people prayed to The LORD and promised that they would destroy Arad's cities if He delivered them. The LORD does just as they requested. It does not surprise us that shortly afterward, there is grumbling and complaining from the people again. They had just had a great victory over Arad and his army, but now because there is no bread or water, they wish they were back in Egypt. They even go so far as to curse the manna that God has been providing them as they travel. So, poisonous snakes were sent among them. Many Israelites died because they were bitten. The surviving Israelites then go to Moses and make a confession of sinning against God. God orders Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. When a person is bitten by a snake and looks at the snake on the pole, he or she will recover.

The snakes were not removed from their presence. The people would still be bitten which I am sure was painful. So they feel the consequences for their sin, but now as long as they look at the snake, they will recover. Similarly, God does not remove all of the difficulties and hardships from our lives, nor has He eliminated all the evil in the world. God also allows the natural consequences of our sins to play out. However, He gives us a way out of it. He sent His Son to free us from our sins and make us clean so that even though we have the sting of sin in our lives, we will not die because of our faith in Christ and what He did for us.

We get into an interesting story about Balaam and Balak. Balaam was a renowned pagan divination expert. Balak wants him to come and ensure Israel's demise.

In the Mark reading, Jesus teaches that it is not what goes into the person that defiles them, but instead it is what comes out of them. This is absolutely true. One discussion I have with my children is about the kind of stuff they consume for entertainment. This is where it gets a little tricky. Depending on what kind of music they are listening to, shows they are watching, or video games they are playing, their behavior sometimes matches what they are taking in. While it is true that it is not what goes in that defiles us, I think it is prudent to watch what we are plugging ourselves into. If we plug ourselves into fellowship with God, then that is what is going to come out of us, but if we plug ourselves mostly into the worldly things, that is more likely what will come out. To put it another way, if I were trying to lose weight, but all I did was eat donuts every day for every meal, then I am setting myself up for failure.

March 1: Numbers 23-25 and Mark 8:1-21

We read about Balaam's oracles, the pagan diviner hired by Balak to curse the Israelites. Balak and Balaam do a fair amount of traveling as they are trying to bring the Israelites to ruin. In the first oracle, God's love for Israel is proclaimed. The question is asked: How can I curse someone who God has not cursed? It is a fair question. If God has not given judgment against the Israelites, how is Balaam going to pronounce judgment against them? Certainly there have been many groups that have tried to decimate the Israelites, yet they are still here. God makes a way for them even when the opposing forces are against them.

God continues to put words in Balaam's mouth. The pagan has now become the mouthpiece for the One True. In the second oracle, God shows that He is not like the other gods of Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamian gods were often shown as whimsical and easily manipulated by bribery. God is not like that. He cannot be bribed with sorcery and divination. He is unchanging.

The third oracle given by Balaam pronounces that God will provide for the Israelites. There will be plenty of water, indicating that the crops will do well. This oracle also reminds them where their strength comes from. Their power comes from The LORD. The fourth oracle prophesies a future in Israel when she is a great kingdom. The star and scepter in verse 17 are symbols of a powerful and glorious kingdom that will subdue her enemies. God is using pagans to pronounce His words.

Meanwhile, the Israelites are camped in Acacia Grove in the lower Jordan River Valley. The men find the local Moabite women attractive and enter into relations with them. This does not bring the Moabite women to the Almighty God. Instead, it draws the Israelite men to begin serving Baal. God has been pronouncing blessings on them, but here they are going against His commands.

In the New Testament reading, we read about the feeding of the 4,000. This is another instance where Christ feeds many with very little. After the feeding, Jesus and the disciples go to the district of Dalmanutha. While they are there, the Pharisees demand a sign. Jesus assures them that no sign will be given. The fact is, even if He had given them a sign, the Pharisees still would not have come over to Christ's side. They would have remained in their hostility toward Him.

Jesus warns the disciples to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. In those days, yeast was a symbol for evil. It permeates, grows, and spreads. Just as the disciples were told to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees, we should as well!