

The Story: Wandering

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's great to have you here this morning. Happy Thanksgiving. Do you notice I changed from my sepulchral prayer voice to my saying the sermon voice?

For those of you who missed the memo, Pastor Kent is our lead pastor and he's away, so I'm filling in. You may well ask, who? And that's a very good question.

What you'll notice, even with Emma, what you'll notice is that when the head pastor's away, normally the first line is you get a guest speaker, and if it's a vacation like a Thanksgiving, you can't get a guest speaker, then you get kind of a fill-in.

And you can tell the difference. This is an inside tip that you should really write down. You can tell the difference between a guest speaker and a fill-in, because the guest speaker gets introduced. Like somebody comes up and they tell you their credentials and they tell you their qualifications. And the purpose of that is that you end up thinking, wow, this person is really smart.

[1 : 04] I should listen. Whereas the fill-in just kind of walks up and he's on his own. It's just him. And I wanted to take that personally, but then I thought, well, like if Leah did that, if she came up here and said, okay, I'm here to introduce you, then what would she say, right? Like, hi, I'm here to introduce Noel.

Yeah. It would just be awkward, so it's probably better that it's this way. The other inside tip that I want to let people know, especially if you're a visitor, is that if I say something that really kind of strikes you, there's kind of a protocol here that if you actually felt the urge to say amen, you have to do it in the Braemar way.

The Braemar way to say amen, and this would only be if something I say is really kind of meaningful to you. You say it like this. You say, amen. That was it. Okay. You don't do it any louder than that. Throw everybody off. So good morning. It's great to have you here. And with all that said, let's make sure that we actually get something meaningful and worthwhile to take away.

Like, it's really important that, and I say this when I run groups too, that you don't just come, sit, listen, and go. That you need to take something away. And so I'm going to talk today.

[2 : 33] There's going to be a bunch about mindset. There's going to be a bunch about attitude, both the Israelites and ours. And I guess one of the things that I think is important is to remember is God has no interest in simply having better informed Christians.

God is looking for better prepared Christians. So it doesn't care if you're better informed when you walk out of here. It cares if you're better prepared. And so prepare to love.

Prepare to help. Prepare to be different in some way. So that would be my hope for today. Here's the first question. I'll ask a few questions today. What is your mindset this morning? Right now, sitting in your incredibly comfortable pew, what are you thinking?

So big picture is we all come to church with one of two mindsets. This is the first one. The first one is I am so thankful I have a church to come to where people care about me, get to learn something that will help me for the rest of my week.

And the other attitude is meh. How long is this going to take? So you come in here with one of those two. In therapy, we call the first one teachable, and we call the second one a bunch of things.

[3 : 43] But let's go with defensive. The first notices, the first mindset notices how well-spoken the speaker is.

The second notices how hard the pews are, right? So it's all mindset. I have three questions to get us started. Number one, what did Pastor Kent talk about last week? Number two, it's Thanksgiving. How thankful are you to be here today?

And number three, did you for sure remember to turn the oven off? So last week, Pastor Kent talked about, it was called New Commands and a New Covenant.

If you missed it, sermons are now available on the church website for free. It's worth a re-listen anyways because you probably missed something, and it was a good sermon. So the focus last

week was on Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments, which Pastor Kent talked about. They provide a foundation for our lives, how to relate to God and how to relate to people. Now for a quiz. What's the first commandment? Who can tell me the first commandment?

[4 : 49] No other God before me. Ten points. If you said it out loud, five points if you knew it but you didn't say anything. Ten points. How about the fifth commandment?

Very good. So 20 points to whoever that was who said that. Five to the rest of you if you knew it but you didn't speak up. And last would be the tenth commandment. Shall not covet.

Good. That's the dreaded, if only I had that, mindset. Ten points for that too. So you had a chance to get 40 points there. 40 church points.

And so you can think about how many you ended up with. That leads us into today where here's what we're going to cover. We're going to cover 40 years of wandering in the desert in under 30 minutes.

And those of you with the hard pew attitude just said to yourself, it better be well under 30 minutes. If you thought that, you just lost ten points.

[5 : 53] Ten points off. If you said it out loud, you'd get five just for being so honest. We will start our journey together today in Numbers 11.

So if you want to grab the heavy book in front of you, which we never use, which I think we should. So heavy book in front of you, Numbers 11. And that is, I believe, like the fourth book from the front. I will give you a minute so I don't embarrass those of you who have trouble finding this. So Numbers chapter 11.

And our scripture section today is going to cover Numbers 11, 12, 13, and 14. That's pretty scary, isn't it?

In under 30 minutes. So Numbers 11. And we will go for a walk together with the Israelites around 1440 B.C.

[6 : 57] That was the closest I could find in the books I read. And we are, you'll be happy to know, going to skim a bit here. The whole section this week at home would be a good read because there's much to be learned from it.

Numbers 11, starting at verse 1. Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord. And when he heard them, his anger was aroused.

It's not what you want. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down.

So that place was called Tabra, which means, by the way, burning, because fire from the Lord had burned among them. The rabble with them began to crave other food.

And again, the Israelites started wailing. I love that word, wailing, and said, If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost.

[8 : 00] Also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite. We never see anything but this manna.

So, that's a 1 to 6. Hold your place, though. For those of you who are newer to the Bible, manna refers to the food that God provided to feed the Israelites throughout their time in the desert.

They appreciated it for about 5 minutes, and then they started complaining about it. But let's look for a moment at the action words. I was going to say what that was.

I always forget, though, whether they're adjectives or verbs or what they are. Verbs. Is that right? Verbs? Is that right? Okay, 5 points for that. Some of you are piling on the points. So, verbs.

What are the verbs that you see in here? They complain. They cry out. They crave. They wail. So, I want you to hang on to that thought, because that's what they're doing.

[9 : 03] Let's go to verse 10. Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled.

I bet he was. He asked the Lord, Do you know what I thought?

I wonder if Pastor Kent ever thinks that. Verse 13. Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, give us meat to eat.

I cannot carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me. Verse 23. This is a key verse. Don't miss this. The Lord answered, Moses, Is the Lord's arm too short?

You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you. And verse 31. Told you you would skim. Now a wind went out from the Lord and drove quail in from the sea.

[10:09] It brought them down all around the camp to about three feet above the ground, as far as a day's walk in any direction. Lots of quail. All that day and night, and all the next day, the people went out and gathered quail.

Let me ask you something. Did this provision, this miraculous response to their grumbling, change anything about the people's mindset?

You think it would, but it doesn't. When we are grumblers, here's a lesson for life. When we are grumblers and we get blessed, we become grumblers who are blessed.

It doesn't change anything. Our attitude does not change when we get what we want. So those of you that are grumblers and hope that the 64 million is going to change it, you'll be grumbling with 64 million.

I know you're willing to risk it, but that's the way it is. Let's move along to Numbers 13. So chapter 13. I want you to be watching for threads and themes.

[11:20] The people are now encamped in the desert of Paran, or Paran, I don't know how to pronounce it. Numbers 13.1, And the Lord said to Moses, Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am going to give, which I am giving to the Israelites.

From each ancestral tribe, send one of its leaders. So at the Lord's command, Moses sent them out from the desert of Paran, or Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites.

These are their names. And I'm not going to read their names, because they're hard to pronounce, and you don't care that much. So these men, maybe that was part of the problem.

So these men went, scouted out the land, returned, and reported. And here's what they had to say.

Verse 27. We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey.

Here's its fruit. But, small word, big impact, but, the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified, and, very large.

[12:29] We even saw descendants of Anak there. I don't know Anak personally, but I think he was probably quite big. The Amalekites live in the Negev, the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country, and the Canaanites live near the sea, and along the Jordan.

I bet some of you thought I was going to mess up some of those names. Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.

Yay, Caleb. But the men who had gone up with him said, We can't, small word, big impact, we can't attack those people. They are stronger than we are.

So, good news and bad news. The land is awesome, just like God promised, but there are obstacles, in the form of, big scary people.

And what is the lesson here? Do we focus on God's promises, and God's power, especially when there's something hard about to happen? Do we focus on God's promises, and God's power, or on the big scary obstacles?

[13:44] Clearly, Caleb was firmly focused on the promise. I like Caleb. I want to be more like Caleb. There was one other person, by the way, he doesn't get the mention here, and you'll meet him again later in the story.

Who was that? Who was the other one who said, sorry? Joshua. Very good. Ten points. Ten points. Ten points.

So, Joshua. You'll hear about him more in, probably next week, actually. But, the people were ready, and willing to listen to the other ten.

Chapter 14, verse 1. That night, all the people of the community raised their voices, and wept aloud. Wept is just a nicer version of wail.

All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, If only, it's never good when you start a sentence with if only, if only we had died in Egypt or in this desert.

[14:45] Why is the Lord bringing us to this land, only to let us die by the sword? Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt? Here we go again with the attitude.

Isn't that a cheery tale? Two roads, their choice, they did not choose well. By the way, at this moment, in this sermon, each of you is making choices.

Two roads, each leading to totally different places. The road to the left is the religious history road. It goes like this.

Interesting story. Boo on the Israelites. What a bunch of whiners. I'd have been right there with Jacob saying, Let's do this. Let's press on. No, you wouldn't.

No, you wouldn't. Most of us would have been right there with the rest of them. Did you see the size of those people? And did you see the size of those walls?

[15 : 45] And did you see the size of those cities? That is what most of us would be doing. Brings us to the road on the right. The road I want to nudge you on to.

Where we humbly consider whether we are, in fact, not very different from the Israelites. And we have a lot that we can learn from their journey and from their mistakes and from their attitude.

For we live in a nation that is wandering around, looking for something.

Not sure what. They're struggling to find it. And the sad part is that us Christians are not that different. We're a bit discontent, or a lot, and a bit dissatisfied, or a lot, and we wander around looking for the new and shiny two that will fill us up, make us feel content, make us feel satisfied. Seems like it's kind of part of the human condition, aside from God, human condition, to be vulnerable to discontent. We are vulnerable to discontent.

[17 : 10] Remember the 10th commandment? Those of you who got 10 points? Do not covet. That's there because God knows us very well. Made us, after all.

So he knows our vulnerabilities very well. Grumbling, complaining, covetousness. They're all closely intertwined, right? They all kind of work together.

And they are all destroyers of true thankfulness. So how do you know? How do you know if your mindset leans towards thanksgiving or towards discontent?

Well, think about that for a moment. It's a good question. So if you asked it, 10 points. 10 points to me because I asked it. How often do you feel thankful for what you have and who you have in your life?

How often do you get actually washed over with a sense of just humble gratitude for the life that God has given you? Like it just washes over you.

[18 : 11] Are you grateful by nature or only when things are great? When things are not great, are you quick to grumble? For we brought nothing into the world That's what grumbling sounds like.

For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Do you live like that? Do you think like that?

Do you want to live like that? I'm going to argue that we cannot get there on our own. Can't do it.

Any more than the Israelites could take the promised land on their own which they tried to do.

If you read this week you find that out didn't go well. We are by nature covetous and discontent. I feel unhappy. What can I buy to feel better?

[19 : 21] What can I do to feel better? And even better what can you do to make me feel better?

That's the wandering self. Looking around looking for things and this can be where God is at work in us.

Changing us changing our mindset changing our focus and healing us from the inside out. He who has begun a good work in us will be and hopefully you know the rest.

The crucial consideration here is not how spiritual you are. It's not how religious you are. It's how humble you are. It's how teachable you are. It's not whether you think you've arrived.

In fact, they're the worst. But whether you're still moving in the right direction. We never arrive.

That's the scary news.

We never arrive. But we keep on the journey. If we're teachable, if we're humble, we're either walking towards God and contentment or we're wandering around.

[20 : 32] That's the two paths. The Israelites wandered around for 40 years in the desert. That seems like a really long time to me. But then I thought, you know what?

Lots of us, if we're honest, we've been wandering around for our whole lives. Our whole lives. Going from this to that and back again to this.

Seeking after. Not sure. Not sure what. But God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

As long as we're on this earth, our lives, your lives, my life, are going to consist of ebbs and flows. Good days and crummy days.

Thanksgiving days and not at all Thanksgiving days. But up on the mountain and down in the valley, we carry with us our faith and our attitude.

[21 : 35] All the time. It's like a backpack. I've always got it on. The very same event can crack a grumbling, discontented soul or just challenge a grateful one.

See, the grumbler lives at the mercy of circumstances. Mercy of circumstances. On the other hand, gratitude, contentment, faith, they can create a stability and a balance in our lives even in the midst of trials and storms.

Be thankful is an incredibly stabilizing way to focus our lives. Storms buffet. Thankfulness creates stability.

Of course, a spirit and mindset of thankfulness begs a couple of pretty crucial questions. First one is who? Sound like an owl.

Who? Who? See, for gratitude or thanksgiving to be stabilizing in our lives, it can't be just sort of this thing that we think about. There has to be a who.

[22 : 45] So, question, who are you grateful for this morning? Hopefully, most of you have someone you're grateful for. If you're really blessed, they're sitting near you today.

To have someone or something in your life you feel profoundly grateful for is a blessed place indeed. But here's an even more profound wondering.

Who are you grateful to? Not just who are you grateful for, but who are you grateful to? See, the deepest, most meaningful sense of gratitude is to be grateful to.

And to provide real stability, I want that to be someone big and powerful, all-knowing, unchanging, everlasting, full of grace.

I want to be grateful to someone like that. Moses spent many years of his life going through ebbs and flows, peaks and valleys.

[23 : 58] What a terrible job. Really. Trying to herd three million. That's what they figure. Somewhere between two and three million. So let's say three. Three million grumbling, complaining, discontented people around.

Pastor Ken only has like a hundred. Moses had three million. Yet at the very end of his life, Moses showed his true self.

Here's some of the last recorded words that Moses ever spoke. There is none like the God of Jeshurun who rides the heavens to your aid.

The clouds in his majesty, the God of old, is your dwelling place. And underneath are his everlasting arms. So Israel dwells securely, Jacob lives untroubled, in a land of grain and new wine. Who is like you? A people saved by the Lord. See, Moses had a stabilizing presence throughout his life. He had his God.

[25 : 06] Moses' life speaks to us of the depth of relationship that we can have with our God and of the gratitude and contentment that comes with this relationship.

No matter the ebbs, no matter the flows, be thankful. Amen.