

Things for the Journey

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[0:00] Well, we're going to, as I said, continue our series through the book of Numbers. But let me begin by asking, when you go on a road trip somewhere, I wonder if you take some things for the journey.

Whether it's a book to read, that is if you're not driving, don't drive and read. Or perhaps a story to listen to if you are driving, or some music, or some snacks to eat.

And if you're the passenger, my wife always takes a pillow to sleep. But when the kids were younger, Michelle found this thing called 50 Things to Do on a Journey to help keep the kids occupied and prevent them from asking that famous question, are we there yet? That's right.

And so it had all these cards with activities to do in the car. And one of them was a game called Pink Toads. And the idea of this game is you'd ask the kids a question and they would have to reply with Pink Toads.

And they had to do it without giggling or going, ooh, that's gross, that kind of thing. And so we would ask the kids, what did you have for breakfast? Pink Toads. What do you wash your face with?

[1:10] Pink Toads. Oh, what just came out of your nose? Ooh! They usually got them giggling or saying, ooh. That is back when they were young and still laughed at my jokes.

Those were the days. But the point is, when you go on a road trip, you often take things for the journey. And today, Israel is about to begin their road trip to the promised land.

And so in chapter 10, verse 11, which is just after our passage, it says, On the 20th day of the second month of the second year after they came out of Egypt, the cloud lifted from the tabernacle, and then the Israelites set out from the desert of Sinai, where they camped at Mount Sinai, and traveled from place to place, there they are on the journey, until the cloud came to rest in the desert of Paran, which is on the edge of the promised land.

But it seems there are some things that they are to do on this journey, which are our chapters today. You see, our chapters today are still part of that movie flashback I mentioned a couple of weeks ago.

Remember how some movies kind of cut to a scene before earlier to give you more detail? And so just to remind you, the book of Numbers actually begins in the second month, and that's chapters 1 to 6, with the census of the tribes as well as the Levites.

[2:31] And then it flashes back to the first month, a month before. And we saw in chapters 7 and 8, we had the offerings from the tribes, as well as the lampstand in the middle of that section.

And today, we're still in that first month, which I think is things for the journey, and before the writer goes back to the chronological order to the second month, and they leave for Sinai.

And the point is, the writer deliberately inserts these events here just before they set out on their journey, as if to say, these things are important to remember for the journey.

And so what things are they? Well, firstly, remembering God's salvation, point 1 and verses 1 to 3. The Lord spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year, so still a month earlier, after they came out of Egypt.

He said, make the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. Celebrate it at the appointed time at twilight on the 14th day of this first month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations.

[3 : 41] And so in verses 4 and 5, that's just what they did. Now, celebrating the Passover meant remembering how God saved them from Egypt through the blood of a lamb.

And so you might remember that God was just about to judge Egypt for enslaving Israel, whom God said was his firstborn son. And in fact, you might also remember that the Egyptians literally drowned all of Israel's sons in the Nile at one point.

And so taking Egypt's firstborn sons was actually just judgment. But Israel was to sacrifice a lamb and, as I've shown you before, put the blood of the lamb on the doorframe, so that when the angel of death saw the blood, it would pass over the house, hence Passover.

And it was this event that caused Pharaoh to let God's people go. In other words, God saved his people from slavery in Egypt through the blood of the lamb.

And it's this event that also now marked the beginning of their calendar, which is why it was always celebrated in the first month every year. But the question again is, why does the writer recall this event now, just before they set out on their journey?

[5 : 00] And I wonder if it's because they're to remember how God saved them in the past, so that they'll be reassured God will save them in the future. You see, in their journey to the promised land, they're going to face all sorts of difficulties and enemies.

Difficulties like a lack of food and water. Enemies like other nations that oppose them along the way, and certainly when they get to the land. And so they're to remember how God saved them in the past, that they might be reassured God will save them in the future and bring them to life in their promised land, their true home.

And so for the journey, they're to remember God's salvation. And I think it's similar for us. So for us, our promised land is not Canaan, it's the new creation, isn't it?

It's the world to come where we'll enjoy life to the full with no more war and suffering. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine turning on the news and there's only good news? There's no bad news.

I mean, what are the journalists going to do? You know, enjoying perfect bodies in a perfect world with great relationships with one another and with God, most of all. And the moment we become Christians, we start our journey towards that, don't we?

[6 : 19] But it's not always smooth sailing, is it? We too face all sorts of difficulties and enemies. Difficulties like suffering and enemies like opposition, as well as the devil himself trying to tempt us away.

And so we too are to remember how God saved us from slavery to sin through the blood of Jesus. We're to remember how God saved us in the past so we'll have confidence, reassurance that God will save us in the future, to enjoy life to the full in our promised land.

I mean, have you ever wondered if it's worth trusting God now, especially when life is hard for you, or your prayers aren't answered the way you'd like them to be?

And so how can we be sure it will be worth it? You know, that God will bring us to the world to come, which will far outweigh everything we've suffered in this world?

Well, because God has already saved us in the past through the blood of Jesus. And if he doesn't bring us home to enjoy life to the full, then he's effectively wasting his son's blood.

[7:26] His son's blood's done the job. He's given us everything we need to forgive us and bring us home. And if he doesn't, he's going to be wasting it. I mean, it's a bit like, imagine for a moment you've saved up all your pennies, and you've gone to the car dealership, and you've bought a brand new car.

Just imagine whatever car you'd like to have. And you've bought it there, and the dealership rings you up and says, it's now arrived, you've got to come and pick it up, but you go, no, actually, no, I don't want to pick it up. I'm just going to leave it there.

You've done the hard job right. You've paid for the car. But if you don't go and bring it home to enjoy, you're wasting your money, aren't you? Well, how much more so with the blood of Jesus, which is way more precious than money?

Do you really think that God would waste even a drop of it by not completing our salvation and bringing us home to glory?

Of course he won't. As we heard in our second reading, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with Christ, graciously give us all things, that is, all things we need, be brought home?

[8:39] And so on our journey, we're to remember how God saved us in the past through Jesus, to reassure us that nothing will separate us from God's love, that he will indeed save us in the future, bringing us home where it will be worth it.

Especially because the alternative is to be cut off from God's people. And so verse 6 and 7, it talks about how some could not celebrate the Passover because they came into contact with a dead body, which made them ceremonially unclean.

Now this wasn't sinful, it was ceremonial. God knows that death is sadly part of this fallen world, but because God is life, the complete opposite, then nothing to do with death, even those who have touched it, can come near.

They're ceremonially unclean. And so in the next verse, in verse 8, Moses says, I'll go and see what God says about this, and off he goes.

And in verses 9 to 12, God gives his answer, and he says they're still to celebrate the Passover, but just a month later. Verse 11 says they're to do it on the 14th day of the second month now, and exactly the same way as those who did it in the first month, at twilight, with herbs, and so on.

[10:02] You see, God makes provision for life in this fallen world. Even if they, verse 10, have to go on another journey, it says, because of a dead body or a way on a journey, verse 10, which, by the way, implies they will make it to the promised land, doesn't it?

Because when are they going to go on other journeys? It's not while they're marching to the promised land. They're not going to kind of go on another journey off and so on. They're going to do it once they're in the land. In fact, verse 14 talks about what to do with foreigners who join them in the land.

Here's another note of reassurance that God will bring them home to their promised land. But notice verse 13, but if anyone who is ceremonially clean and not on a journey, that is, they can celebrate the Passover, but fails to celebrate the Passover, they must be cut off from the people for not presenting the Lord's offering at the appointed time.

They will bear the consequences of their sin. You see, if anyone, whether in the first month or the second month, can celebrate it but refuses to do so, they'll be cut off from God's people.

Why? Well, because they're refusing to be part of God's salvation for them. You see, it is a bit like communion, which we'll have later. When we have communion, we don't just remember Jesus' death for us.

[11:21] We certainly do that. But we also participate in it. The Bible in 1 Corinthians 10 talks about participating in it. That is, as we eat and drink, we're saying, yes, Jesus' body and blood, his death, has paid for my sin and saved me from judgment.

But if they refuse to celebrate the Passover, they're refusing to participate in God's salvation for them. They're effectively saying, I don't want to be part of that anymore.

I don't want that Passover, you know, to have kind of saved me. And so it's only right that God cuts them off because they're saying, I don't want to participate in God's people anymore. And so they will have to suffer the consequence of their own sin.

And I wonder if there's a warning for us here too, not so much about communion, but about rejecting God's salvation for us in Jesus. If we persistently don't want to have a part of that, if we don't want his death to count, you know, to pay for our sin, then of course the consequence is going to be, well, if you don't want that, then I won't give that.

We won't be part of God's people anymore. And so it's far better to remember God's salvation rather than reject it, isn't it? And so on the journey, we're to remember rather than reject God's salvation for us through Jesus, that we might have reassurance God will bring us home where it will be worth it.

[12:50] But Israel will also obey God's commands through the cloud to guide them. Our point to verse 15. On the day of the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law was set up, the cloud covered it.

From evening to morning, the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be. The cloud covered it and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out.

Whenever the cloud settled, the Israelites set up camp. At the Lord's command, the Israelites set out and at his command, they set up camp. Now it's hard to know exactly what this looked like.

Here's one artist's interpretation of the cloud above the tabernacle. You can see Israel's tents camped around in their various tribes. And at night, perhaps it looked a bit like that.

And the cloud not only represented God's presence, but also God's guidance about when to set out or when to camp. Though it seemed to work together with the ark.

[13:52] So towards the end of chapter 10, it talks about how they set out from mountain of the Lord and traveled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them.

So it's out the front leading them during those three days to find them a place to rest. And the cloud of the Lord was over them by day when they set out from the camp.

And so it seems the ark and the cloud would work together, which makes sense because they both represent God, right? And so the cloud kind of lifted, which told the Israelites to pack up and get ready to move.

And then once they were packed, as we'll see in a moment, a trumpet sounded and told them to start moving, walking forward with the ark of the covenant at the front and the cloud over them.

And then presumably the ark and the cloud would stop together and then the cloud would come down, which would signal, set up camp. And so that's what they did. But the thing to notice here is the cloud is actually parallel with God's command.

[14:55] So if you look at verse 17 and 18 on the screen, notice how it says, verse 17, the cloud lifted, the Israelites set out. But verse 18, the Lord's command, and Israelites set out.

You see how they're in parallel, the cloud and the command are in parallel with each other? It's the same for when they camp. In other words, on the journey, they're to obey God's command through the cloud, to guide them about when to set out and when to camp.

And this is so important, the writer repeats it. I mean, like lots. Have a listen as we go from verse 17 to the end of the chapter.

The writer says, Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out. Whenever the cloud settled, the Israelites set up camp. At the Lord's command, the Israelites set out, and at his command, they set up camp.

As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the Lord's order and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle for only a few days.

[16:02] At the Lord's command, they would set up camp. And at his command, they would set out. Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening to morning. And when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out.

Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and would not set out. But when it lifted, they would set out. At the Lord's command, they set up camp. And at the Lord's command, they set out.

They obeyed the Lord's command in accordance with his command through Moses. Could he repeat himself anymore? Why does he do that? Well, to emphasize its importance, you see.

On the journey, it's important they obey God's command through the cloud to guide them. Now, you might wish you had a cloud to guide you in life.

But the cloud just kind of went up, hovered, and went down. And yes, it glowed at night, which would have been helpful. But we have something even better. We have God's word and spirit, don't we?

[17:04] And in God's word, he gives us a whole lot more specific direction. And we're to obey God's commands through his word. With God's spirit to convict us and prompt us.

That he might guide us in life on our journey, which is for our good. Some members of my Bible study on Wednesday night come through my backyard.

Because it's just easier to park. But ever since getting a dog, my daughter has to clean up the backyard before they arrive. So, shall we say, no landmines from the dog are left.

You know what I'm talking about, right? But last week, she didn't have time to do that. And so, I had to send an instruction to those who came through the back to guide them a different way.

If you like, I gave them a command through the iCloud, if you like, rather than cloud, to guide them for their good. And they obeyed, which their shoes and my carpet appreciated.

[18:02] The point is, God's commands guide us for our good. And so, on the journey, how are we going at obeying God's commands through his word? Like, for example, when it says in Romans 12, if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

It's not always possible because of other people. But if it is possible, as long as it depends on you, live at peace, which is good for us because doesn't conflict create tension in us, make us feel sick sometimes if it's really bad conflict?

And peace, isn't peace, well, peaceful? It is, isn't it? It's for our good. Or Colossians 3, verse 1, talks about setting our hearts on things above, our true home where Christ is, not on earthly things like money or material possessions or even our health because they're all bound to disappoint us.

Money doesn't last, material possessions break, and our health is never always perfect, is it, sadly? And so, if we set our hearts on those things, if they become most important to us, we're bound to be disappointed.

But if we obey God's commands and set our hearts on things above, we won't be. It's good for us. Or Hebrews 10, 25, about not giving up meeting together.

[19:27] People these days now define, in fact, our Anglican Church in Melbourne now defines regular church attendance as once per month. I'm not sure God would define regular attendance as once a month because the early church met, how often?

Every week, yeah. On the first day of the week they would gather, we're told, in Acts. And so, whatever it is, on our journey, we're to obey God's commands through his word to guide us because they're actually for our good.

To meet together, to be encouraged, and ask after each other. And Israel, finally, we're to call on God to help. So, point three, chapter 10, verse one. The Lord also said to Moses, make two trumpets of hammered silver and use them for calling the community together and for the camps to set out, he says.

The trumpets were to call people to gather and set out once the cloud lifted and they'd packed up. And the following verses give a little bit more detail. So, verse three and four talks about how when both trumpets are sounded, the whole nation gathers to hear what God says through Moses.

But verse four, if only one trumpet sounds, only the leaders gather. And in terms of setting out, verse five and six give a bit more detail as well. It tells us that it's one trumpet blast per tribe, which makes sense because they were to set out one tribe at a time and in order, the order we saw back in chapter two.

[20:54] But the main two purposes here are to gather and to set out. And notice in verse eight, God's priests were to sound them because this is really God's call to them.

Of course, today we don't have trumpet calls to gather people together for church, although our church, as you might remember, used to use... Well, that's wedding bells, isn't it?

Anyway, they used to use bells to gather people together. But now we all know the service times and we all have watches and phones with alarms.

We don't need a bell to call us. But we also have God's word to remind us, like we saw before, about the importance of gathering together.

And what's more, if we were to ring our bells for our early morning service, it might not help us evangelize our neighbors. The point is the trumpets called on people to gather or set out, but they actually also called on God to remember.

[22:02] Verse 9 and 10, our last two verses. When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is opposing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies.

Also at your times of rejoicing, your appointed festivals and new moon feasts, you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you. That is, God will remember you through them.

I am the Lord your God. So here there's sound the trumpets and God would remember. Not that God forgets, just to be clear. In the Old Testament where it says God remembered, it really means God will act.

And so verse 9, they're to sound the trumpet in battle for God to act by rescuing them from their enemies, which they would need in the promised land. And in verse 10, they're to sound the trumpet at festivals for God to act by accepting their sacrifices and showing favour like forgiveness or hearing their prayer or accepting their praise, those things that accompanied those sacrifices.

Both times they're calling on God through the trumpets to act with help, whether it's rescue or favour. And we know God will answer because of the second last word of our passage.

[23:27] You see the second last word there? Your. He is the Lord their God. He is their God and they are his people.

He has a covenant relationship with them and so he will hear them. Of course, Jesus has made an even better covenant relationship for us where God is not just our God but our Father.

And so we know he will also hear our prayers and act for our good, even if we can't always see it. As Jesus himself says in Matthew 7, if you parents know though you were evil, you know, sinful, but you still know how to give good gifts to your children, well, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

God is our heavenly Father and so he will act for our good, even if we cannot see it at the time. As for us, we're to call on God through prayer rather than trumpet to help us until that day when Jesus returns and the last trumpet will sound and call his people together.

Jesus also said in Matthew's Gospel, the Son of Man will come on the clouds with great power and glory and he will send his angels and with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his people from the four corners of the earth.

[24 : 57] And that's the trumpet call we really need to be ready for, isn't it? By believing in Jesus. And so can I ask you first this morning, do you believe in Jesus? Do you know God's salvation through Jesus?

Are you ready for that last trumpet call? For us who do believe, then to summarise the application we've seen so far, on our journey, remember God's salvation through Jesus to reassure us.

Obey God's command through the Bible to guide us and call on God to act through prayer to help us. I know they might seem like the Sunless School basics, but they're the basics for a reason.

For these are the essential things to do on our journey. Way more important than playing pink toes. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this reminder of the things that we are to do on our journey to our promised land.

And so we pray for your help to do them. And to remember our salvation through Jesus in the past to reassure us that you'll bring us home to glory.

[26 : 08] And to obey your commands through the Bible. And to guide us for our good. And also to keep calling on you through prayer to help us.

Let's do this.