

Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness

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[0 : 00] Well friends, I ummed and ah'd all afternoon whether I could resist starting tonight's sermon with a tiny little piece out of Monty Python.

I don't know if any of you know, there's a little skit in the middle of it, Monty Python and the Holy Grail, about holy hand grenades, and they have a reading which sounds very much like Leviticus and Numbers in places, and they have a wonderful play on Numbers, but things came apart right at the end, and so you're going to have to miss out on that, which is a pity, because those of you who don't know Monty Python, well you know, some of you wouldn't understand it, but anyway, others of you who haven't been introduced to Monty Python, they claimed on some of the websites I was looking at today, that they are the cause for YouTube, because people ripped off their stuff and posted it all over YouTube.

Anyway, I don't know if that's the case, but they reckon it got great impetus from Monty Python. Anyway, I thought instead I would give you a reading from Numbers chapter 1, so you might like to, uh...

You might like to turn to it. And I'm going to give you a feel for reading Numbers, which is why...

By the way, I want... I'm sorry, this is a really sort of just relaxed start to this sermon. I want you to put up your hand if you've started reading through the Bible and stopped in Numbers.

[1 : 35] That is, you know, you've had... Yeah, yeah, there's a few takers here. It's not surprising, and I'll show you why. Now, I'm going to skip over the names, because Matt's already done such a good job with it.

But let's just choose a piece out of chapter 1. I'm going to read from chapter 1, verse 42.

The descendants of Naphtali, their lineage in their clans, by their ancestral homes, according to the number of the names from 20 years old and upward, everyone able to go to war, those enrolled in the tribe of Naphtali were 53,400.

These are those who were enrolled, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled with the help of the leaders of Israel, 12 men, each representing his ancestral house. So the whole number of the Israelites, by their ancestral houses, from 20 years old and upward, everyone able to go to war in Israel, their whole number was 600, 3,000, 550.

The Levites, however, were not numbered by their ancestral tribe along with them. And so it goes on. And so by the time you've got about two or three chapters in, you are fading and you think, I can't do this any longer.

[3 : 07] And some of you will have got to that point and said, I'm just going to skip all of this. And why? Because, well, Numbers just looks like such a complex book. And one way to look at it is exactly that way.

It is a complex book. There are seemingly endless lists. There are just numbers all over the place. And some of the numbers are just repeated. So you've got 12 tribes who say almost exactly the same thing.

In fact, the numbers are even exactly the same. And you think, what on earth is going on here? There are detailed itineraries of where people went and who they saw and detailed lists of people.

There are laws and statutes. There are rituals. There are prescriptions about priests. There were poems and poetic oracles. There are wilderness stories. There are well-known benedictions.

There are weird stories of talking donkeys, bumbling prophets, almond-producing rods, bronze snakes with healing properties. And all of those things make up what is a very complex book.

[4 : 07] In fact, it is so complex and strange that it is often the place where people come to an end who have decided, as we've seen even in this congregation, who have decided, I'm going to read the Bible from cover to cover, they get to numbers and crash.

So it is a very complex book. And it is absolutely impossible for us tonight to cover and explain its complexity. It's just not going to happen. So I'll tell you what I'm going to do tonight.

I'm going to outline some of the different ways you can look at the book of Numbers. I'm going to tell you the story of Numbers sort of in very, very broad outline. And then I'm going to tell you how one part of the Bible is applied, applied the book of Numbers.

And then I'm going to show you how the New Testament applies the book of Numbers. Now, I think if we do all of that, we've done a pretty good effort. So let's have a shot at it together. And before I do, I want to tell you, I'm really not going to delve into the details of the book.

So I'd encourage you to read the book for yourself. And my little clue for you, read it fast. And then stop when it really gets interesting.

[5 : 15] Don't skip things. Just read it fast. There's nothing wrong with reading the Bible fast. We're so used to reading the epistles that we don't know how to read other sections. So read it fast and stop when the story slows down.

It has some fascinating stories in it and some deep and abiding truths. So let's pray and let's ask God to help us understand it. Father, we thank you for this book.

We thank you for the riches of it. And we pray that you'd help us to learn from it tonight, that we might grow as your disciples, as the disciples of the Lord Jesus. We pray this in Jesus name.

Amen. Now, the first thing to say about the book of Numbers is that it is part of one long story. And so I want to review that story and just help you fit it in. Genesis 1 to 11 tells us the story of how God created the world and he put humans in the world.

Humans, however, we know, turn to independence and sin. God responded himself by judgment and blessing. But he also responded with great grace. And his grace was displayed in one particularly significant event, which is outlined in Genesis 12, 1 to 3.

[6 : 23] God chose one human through whom he would bless the world. And that human, of course, we know was Abraham. Three promises were given to Abraham. God would give him a land.

He'd give him children and make him a great nation. He would bless him and make him a blessing to all the world. Now, when you read through Genesis, you find out that most of Genesis is focused just on that second promise.

That is, is Abraham and are his children going to have children? And for most of Genesis, Abraham and his family are just struggling to have children and become that great nation that God wanted them to be.

Toward the end of Genesis, though, we see a shift. They begin to grow as a nation. They shift out of Palestine or what we know as Palestine into the land of Egypt.

And there in Egypt, they are a blessing to Egypt. Then we move to the book of Exodus. And here they are blessed by God. They become this massive, massive nation.

[7 : 25] They are persecuted by Pharaoh who perceives them as a threat. Then they are taken out by God from the land. And by the end of Exodus, what's the situation?

Well, by the end of Exodus, they have the promise of children. There's masses of them. But they're out of the land. So that promise is sort of in abeyance. And eventually they're even out of Egypt.

And they're just in this no man's land, as it were, between Egypt and the promised land. That's where we are between Exodus 14 and the book of Joshua. Now, that is a long slab of time, a long slab of literature to cover 40 years.

It's a long, long time. And this great nation is there in this wilderness experienced. They're there. They are great, just as God had promised.

But they're still not in the land that God promised. They're journeying to it. And that is where Numbers comes in. That is where the book of Numbers gets its focus. It is part of what happens between when they escape out of Egypt, meeting with God at Mount Sinai, and then entering into the promised land in the book of Deuteronomy.

[8 : 36] So that is the very first thing to know about the book of Numbers. It is part of this large story about the promises to Abraham and their fulfillment. So with that said, let's now turn to the book of Numbers.

And I want to show you something. I want you to have a look at the very first few verses of chapter 1. So open it up. Easy to find. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers.

Have a look at what it says. Verse 1 tells us they are still in the wilderness under Mount Sinai. So they've come out of Egypt. They've stopped at Sinai. And that's where they are.

A year and a month. That is 13 months have passed since they've come out of the land of Egypt. And in verse 2, God speaks. And he tells Moses, take a census of the whole congregation of Israel.

And this is the first census that is listed in the book of Numbers. Now turn to Numbers chapter 26, verse 2. So Numbers 26, verse 2.

[9 : 38] And look what God does. He commands a second census. Now in some ways, you can see that the book of Numbers is actually about a story of two censuses.

I don't know if they're censuses or censai or whatever they are, but censuses. Okay? Now let me show you something else. Look at Numbers 26 and go to the end of the chapter.

So we've looked already at the beginning, verse 2. Now go to the end and look at verses 63 to 65. We're told this. Now go to the end and look at the end of the chapter.

By the Jordan. Among these, there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest who had enrolled the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai.

Now I wonder if you can see what's going on here. Read the next verse. Now can you hear what's being said?

[10 : 52] Apart from Caleb, Joshua and Moses and those who are under 20 years old at the first census, there is no overlap between census 1 and census 2.

And if you read on, you'll find that Moses himself is excluded from going into the promised land. So the overlap between the two censuses is Caleb, Joshua and those who had been under 20 in the first census.

In other words, this book is not just the story of two censuses. It is also the story of two generations. Let me show you why this is.

We've looked at the beginning of the book. We've looked at the latter half of the book. Now let's look at the middle. Have a look at verse 13. Actually, it's not quite the middle. It's only about a third of the way through. But let's have a look because it's a seminal thing that happens.

We read it in our Bible reading. In verse 1, God speaks again to Moses. And look at verse 2. God says, Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites.

[11 : 56] From each of their ancestral tribes, you shall send a man, everyone a leader among them. So you've got 12 tribes. You take a leader from each of them and you send them to spy out the land.

These are people from the first generation. That is, those who are counted in that first part of the book. Now skim through the chapter and you'll see what happens when they spy out the land.

Verse 27. They report the land is abundant. It's flowing with milk and honey. You might not think that's great. But for an Israelite, that's really good.

It is very rich. It's just, you know, flowing with all the good things of life. And its fruit is large and good. And then they add this little caveat.

It is filled with big, strong, numerous people who have big fortifications. Now look at verse 30. Caleb, who is one of the spies, speaks a word of assurance and says, No, no, let's go up into the land.

[12 : 59] In verse 31. The other men come back at him and they say, It is simply not possible for us, puny Israel, to combat the tall, strong and mighty people of this land.

It's just not going to happen. Now look at chapter 14. The whole of the people of God join in a sort of mass grumble. It is one large grumble that becomes renowned throughout all of the rest of scripture.

They start saying, Let's go back to Egypt. And in verse 5, Joshua and Caleb respond. Because Joshua had been on the spy trip as well. They don't refer to the size of the people, but to the goodness and the power of God.

Finally, in verse 11, God speaks of people as being people of faithlessness. Can you see it there? Verse 11. They don't believe in God. They don't have faith in God.

God promised the land to Abraham. God had rescued them from the land of Egypt to face a huge and a powerful and a strong enemy. And he overcame that enemy.

[14 : 04] And he can do exactly the same thing now. Only a year and a bit later. Can he do the same in the land of Canaan? Of course he can. Will they believe it?

Not a chance. They will have nothing to do with it. They don't believe it. They are totally lacking in faith in a mighty God who gives and keeps his word.

This generation of Israel is a faithless one. And so God is going to destroy them. In verse 13, Moses intercedes for them just like he did in Exodus.

God agrees to spare Israel from wholesale destruction and pardons them. Have a look at verse 22. So chapter 14 now, verse 22.

God promises that none of the generation who came out of Egypt and were counted in the opening chapters of Numbers will be going into the promised land.

[15 : 00] None except Caleb. And verse 29 includes those who are under 20 years old. And verse 31 adds Joshua. Now look at verse 33. We're told that the process is going to take 40 years.

One year in the wilderness for every day that these guys spent exploring the land, spying out the land.

And all because of the faithlessness of this generation. So there we have it. Can you see what it is? It's a book about two censuses, a book about two generations. And the first generation is utterly faithless, except for just some supreme exceptions.

Then the second generation stands on the edge of the promised land after having been numbered at the end of Numbers. And we wonder, will they do any better than those who preceded them?

Will they do any better? Finally, this book is a book which explains why a short journey that should have taken a very short time actually takes 40 years.

[16:06] It's a long way of explaining what happened, but that's exactly what happened. Because of faithlessness, what should have been a very short trip takes 40 years. So we've got two censuses, two generations.

There are also two stages. And you can see it in my diagram, which hopefully we're going to have up on here. Two stages. Can you see it there? Numbers 1 to 25 and Numbers 26 to 36.

Both start with a census. Both have common elements within them, even though they're ordered slightly differently, but they are in common. There's also another way to view the story.

The story can be viewed geographically. Have a look at my next diagram. And you've got it in your outlines, but you've got it on colour here. So the story happens in three locations. Location number one, Mount Sinai.

Location number two, near Kadesh. Location three, the plains of Moab. And in between Sinai and Kadesh, there's a journey. And in between Kadesh and the plains of Moab, there's a journey.

[17:07] And so there's the other way to view the story. It's a story about three locations and what happens. Let's move on now to our final observation on Numbers as a whole. We've already seen Israel is faithless.

That's the core, the heart of the book of Numbers. Israel is faithless. You don't need any more evidence than that heart, although there's lots of it.

It is stated as plain as day in the heart of the book. This is the very first theological thing to learn from the book of Numbers. Israel is faithless.

The nature of God's people is the same as the nature of human beings as a whole. They don't trust God. They don't live by God's word. They are faithless. But their faithlessness is set against something else in the book.

It's set against God's faithfulness. I want you to turn with me. Numbers chapter 2 and look at verse 32. So Numbers 2, 32.

[18:07] I want you to look at the number of the Israelites. 603,550. Okay, 603,550.

Now go to chapter 26, the second census, and look at verse 51. Look at the number of the Israelites. How many?

601,730. In other words, God has not failed his people. They're around about the same number as they were before the fall.

God has preserved his people. He's kept their number reasonably static through the time in the wilderness. Deuteronomy 28, verse 4 tells us that in those 40 years they wandered in the wilderness, their clothing didn't even wear out, and their feet did not swell from all that walking they were doing.

And Deuteronomy 29, verse 5 says, not even their sandals wore out. I checked on the internet and everyone's arguing about whether that's possible or not for their sandals to wear out, not wear out.

[19 : 12] But what it says here is their sandals. That is their clothing. The God looked after them. Everything was okay. They ate well. They drank well. In other words, in the face of Israel's faithlessness, God was faithful.

They kept running away from him, not doing his will. He kept doing his word that he had promised to them. He protected them. He cared for them. He fulfilled his word to them.

You see, the picture of humanity and of God here is thoroughly consistent, isn't it? God is true. God is faithful. By their nature, people are unable to consistently and uniformly depend upon him.

The Bible says that all of us were made to be dependent upon our maker, but we cannot do it. We are unable to do it. Friends, I wonder if you really believe that. It is a thoroughly pure and true picture of humanity.

That is what we are like. We are unable to meet our own goals and standards. We are totally unable to meet God's goals and standards, which is total dependence upon him.

[20 : 19] This is our nature. Israel is not alone. They are a picture of humanity as a whole. So the Bible starts with Adam and Eve to show you what they're like. And then it shows you that Israel is just more of the same.

Friends, there's an outline of the whole book of Numbers, just in very brief form. You can fill it in by reading the little bits and pieces. Now, various parts of the book of Numbers have crept into the rest of the Bible.

And I want to show you one of them. I want to take a quick look at Psalm 95. So can you turn to Psalm 95 with me? Now, Psalm 95.

I think I've even got a page number for it. But if someone can beat me to it. 479. Psalm 95.

It is a psalm about people corporately meeting together to praise God. You can see that in verses 1 and 2. And in verses 3 to 5, extol God as a great God and a great king above all gods.

[21 : 20] Some of the older ones in the congregation here, if they ever went to morning prayer. You said it every Sunday, this one. Psalm 95 is a great celebration of who God is. Verses 6 and 7.

Call upon his people to worship him and listen to his voice. But I want you to look at verses 8 and 9. Because what they do is they recall an event that happened in Exodus 17, before Sinai, when Israel has just come out being rescued from the sea.

Right at the start of the time between Egypt and the promised land, they tested God. Now look at verse 10 in this psalm. It refers to the events of the book of Numbers.

God's people are said to be people whose hearts go astray. They do not regard God's ways. They are objects of God's anger. And the end result is that they will not enter into God's rest.

That is, their sinful disposition is such that it will stop them from entering the rest of the land in the presence of God. I wonder if you can see what this psalm is doing.

[22 : 23] It is referring to Israel. And it's saying what the book of Numbers says. God is the only true God. He is the creator and the sustainer. And yet Israel, by its very nature, is faithless and sinful.

And that will be such that it stops them entering rest in God's promised land. In the book of Numbers, we read that rest is represented by the land of promise. You go into the land.

You have your fig tree. And you lie underneath it and wait for the figs to drop into your mouth. And then you eat off the grapes and turn them into wine. And, you know, it's a delight, resting in the presence of God.

God excludes, though, all those who are sinful and faithless from such rest. So here's how one part of the Old Testament uses the book of Numbers. Now, what I want to do now is see how the New Testament uses the book of Numbers.

Now, you may stop when you get to the book of Numbers and you're reading through your Bible. But the New Testament loved it. They thought Numbers was just such good stuff. Probably not so much because of the Numbers.

[23 : 28] But let me show you some of the things that they thought were delightful. For example, the book of Numbers has the story of Balaam and his talking donkey. If you haven't read that, read it.

It is a great story. Now, Balaam is a rather famous character in the New Testament. He occurs in 2 Peter, Jude, the book of Revelation. And in each case, he's not a person you should copy.

He's someone who's an example not to copy. Elsewhere in the New Testament, there is much talk of not... Have you read in the New Testament all those references to not grumbling and complaining? Guess where they come from?

The book of Numbers. Because that's where Israel excels at it. Now, again, you are not to be like the people in Numbers. So, now let's turn to the temptation of Jesus.

And I want you in your Bibles to turn to Matthew chapter 4. Matthew 4, and I've got a page number now, 785. Matthew 4. It's about Jesus being tempted.

[24 : 31] And I want you to notice what it says. First of all, it talks about the wilderness. Now, do you remember wilderness? Wilderness was where Israel was in Numbers chapter 14, where they failed spectacularly.

It was the wilderness that was where Israel failed. Verse 2 talks about 40 days and 40 nights. Now, remember, it was 40 days that the spies were in the land.

And 40 years that they spent wandering in the wilderness. Now, look at the temptations Jesus is subjected to. In verse 3, he's tempted in relation to food, just as Israel was in the wilderness.

Jesus succeeds, unlike Israel. In verse 5, he's tempted in relation to God's protection of him, just as Israel was. And Jesus succeeds, unlike Israel.

Then in verse 8, and we're told that Jesus succeeds because he lives by the word of God, as Israel didn't. Then in verse 8, Jesus is tempted in relation to idolatry, just as Israel was.

[25 : 40] And unlike Israel, Jesus succeeds. In Luke's gospel, at the end of this temptation story, Jesus returns from his encounter with the devil.

And do you know what the text says? He was filled with the Spirit. He was filled with the Holy Spirit as he came out of his encounter with the devil. Again, where Israel failed by faithlessness.

Israel is strengthened and empowered by the Spirit in obedience. I wonder if you can hear all the allusions to numbers. Jesus, you see, is the new Israel.

An Israel who succeeds where the previous Israel failed. An Israel who's open to the possibility of rest in the presence of God. Now, another reference.

Have a look at John chapter 3. 8, 6, 4 in your Bibles. So John chapter 3. And I want to look at verses 14 and 15. Now, just in order for you to understand what these verses mean, let me tell you about one thing that happened in Numbers.

[26 : 45] It's in Numbers 21. Don't look it up. I'll tell you the story. Numbers 21. People are grumbling. Grumbling against Moses. They don't like the food that God's providing. They've had this sort of manner, this wafer-like stuff for too long.

And they don't like it anymore. They don't like the difficulties they're experiencing. God acts to judge them. He sends poisonous snakes or serpents among them.

And many Israelites die. They realize their folly and they do the right thing. They repent. And then they beg Moses to pray to God so that he might take away this. God might take away the serpents.

And miraculously, God does. And God tells Moses, look, make this bronze serpent and put it in clear sight of the people. Anyone who's bitten can look upon the bronze serpent and you'll live.

Now, look, go back to John's Gospel and look at what Jesus says. Verses 14 and 15. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

[27 : 56] And listen to the verse that follows immediately after. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Friends, did you hear it again?

Numbers has formed how Jesus understood himself. And he understood that as he hung on the cross, he would be like that serpent in the wilderness.

And if you believed in him, you would have eternal life. A life of eternal quality and quantity. Friends, if you're not Christian here tonight, then I urge you to hear this word from Jesus.

Because he's God's solution to sin. He is God's answer to human need. Recognize your need and turn your eyes toward him. Believe in him and be saved.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Now let's turn to 1 Corinthians 10. Sorry, there's lots of Bible flipping tonight, but you'll be okay.

[29 : 02] Okay, 932 in your Bibles. 1 Corinthians 10. Now here, we've got the Apostle Paul talking. And he says that there are various parallels between Christians and Israelites who went through the Exodus and the wilderness.

You see, Israelites had a sort of baptism. You might think, how was that? Well, they went through water, you see. So Israelites had a sort of baptism. And they had a sort of common and shared food and drink.

So they had almost a sort of Lord's Supper, as it were. And then Paul goes on to note some explicit things that happened in Exodus and Numbers. First, look at verse 7.

He refers to the event of the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. And he says that sort of idolatry brought God's judgment. In verse 8, he talks about sexual immorality and how that resulted in many thousands of people dying.

That's a reference to Numbers 25. Then he talks about putting God to the test and how Christians can do the same. And in the process, he mentions serpents and grumbling and complaining.

[30 : 09] That's a reference to Numbers 14 and Numbers 21. And then he tells us that there are these stories that are in the Old Testament, such as in the Book of Numbers, are warnings and examples for us as Christians.

They are warnings not to get caught up in the same things. They're examples of things not to do and what God might do in response to our sin if we got engaged in these sorts of things. So, let me give you some application.

Are you struggling with sexual sin? Then go and read Numbers. It'll be good for you. It'll teach you things. Now, it'll give you a feel for what God thinks about sexual sin and why you shouldn't engage in it.

Read Numbers. It'll be very good for it. Read Numbers if you are struggling with the evils of the world around us. It'll give you a feel.

If you read Numbers, it'll give you a feel for what God thinks about the evils of the world and why you shouldn't engage in them. Are you an idolater in your heart, looking around at the world and worshipping things that are not true?

[31 : 19] Then if you are, read Numbers, because God will straighten you out. He'll tell you what he thinks about idolatry in the heart and in life. Read Numbers if you're thinking you can get away with testing God.

Are you a grumbler and a complainer about what God is doing and who God is and what he's like and what he's doing in your life? Read Numbers. Because it'll tell you what God thinks about complainers and grumblers.

Numbers will give you a feel for what God thinks about such things and why you should run away from them. The book of Numbers is therefore a Christian book full of Christian examples of what not to do and what to do.

So we Christians should read Numbers. Read it and learn about God and his ways. This is our God, the God of Numbers. Read it and learn how to live and how not to live before God.

So friends, when you next start to read the Bible from cover to cover, don't stop at Numbers. Because if you read past that first genealogy, it'll open up for you.

[32 : 25] So read on. There's much to learn from it. Now, to wrap up tonight, I want to look at Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. So anyone got a page number for that? Hebrews 3 and 4.

1, 7, 2? 9, 7, 2. Thank you. So 9, 7, 2. Let's start at verse 7. Hebrews 3. Now, I want you to notice he quotes Psalm 95, which we have already looked at.

And he quotes the last part of the psalm, which is the bit which looks back to Exodus and Leviticus. Now look at verse 12. And look at what our author does.

Look at what he has to say. And listen carefully to it. Because he says this. Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

That is, don't be like those people in numbers. Exhort one another every day as long as it is still called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

[33 : 30] For we have become partakers in Christ if only we hold fast our confidence firm to the end. As it is said, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

Now, who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? With whom was he angry those 40 years?

Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they wouldn't enter his rest if not those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Friends, can you hear what this writer is saying? He is saying that we can learn something very important for the Christian life both in Numbers and in Psalm 95.

We have learnt, and friends most of us don't know this or believe it or live it. We have learnt that the Christian life is not over until the end.

[34 : 29] The Christian life is not over until the end. Just as Israel had to remain faithful, so do we. In fact, you know, the way to tell a Christian is not that they believed 10 years ago or a year ago or a week ago.

It is whether they believe now and don't harden their hearts. And then whether they are still believing at the end. So friends, the question to ask yourself is, do I believe in Jesus today?

Now in chapter 4, he does some theological reflecting and he notes the use of the term rest in Psalm 95. And he goes back to Genesis and the fact that God rested on the seventh day.

And he says that the real rest then is not rest in the land. No, it's the eternal rest that you have in the presence of God. And entering that rest comes with effort.

Can you see verse 11 of chapter 4? Have a look at it. There's something really weird about it. You tell me if you can notice what's weird. He speaks of working or making an effort to enter rest.

[35 : 40] That's weird, isn't it? Because you think that rest is rest. But he says, no, you've got to work to stay there. You've got to work to enter there. You've got to work to stay there. That is, you've got to continue believing.

Friends, the writer of Hebrews has told us something very significant for our Christian lives. It's something you see in Numbers, Psalm 95. And that is this, that the Christian life is a constant struggle and a battle and an effort to maintain the faith.

It is to keep our confidence in Jesus and no one else. It's to keep being full of faith in him. Friends, I've been a Christian for over 30 years.

And it is still an effort to keep going. And I take it, it will be like that to the end. In the last six weeks here at Holy Trinity, we have buried 10 people.

Or we will have in six or seven weeks. And most of them have been firm believers in Jesus. And most of them have stuck at it all their lives.

[36 : 49] Friends, that's what God calls you to do. To maintain the faith. To keep believing today and tomorrow. And the day after.

And the day after that. And to die believing. That is, to die well. So are you striving to enter God's rest? Or are you like faithless Israel in the wilderness?

Flipping after transitory things. And chasing after things that please, but which do not last. No friends, learn from Numbers. You can't do this. Strive to enter God's rest.

And how do you do that? By believing in Jesus. By choosing to follow Jesus. And how do we do that best? By encouraging each other in that. Encourage one another while it is still called today.

Lest any of you. Be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. For we have become partners in Christ. Listen to it. Only if we hold fast our confidence firm to the end.

[37 : 49] And you can only do that with God's help. And each other's help. So. I want to just close by showing you a hymn. That we don't sing at six o'clock.

And in fact. Most Christians only sing three verses out of the five. It's in your outlines there. Have a look at it with me. It's Numbers. Basically. Someone's written a hymn about Numbers. It's a bit quaint.

You won't understand some of the language. Some of you. But have a look at the theology. Guide me. Oh thou great Jehovah. Pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak.

But thou art mighty. Hold me with thy powerful hand. Bread of heaven. Bread of heaven. Feed me till I want no more. Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain. Where the living waters flow. Let the river of salvation. Follow all the desert through. Strong deliverer.

[38 : 50] Strong deliverer. Be still my strength and shield. Be thou still my strength and shield. Can you see where his faith and his confidence are? Lord I trust thy mighty power.

Wondrous are thy works of old. Thou deliverest thine from thralldom. That is from slavery. Who for naught themselves had sold. Thou didst conquer.

Thou didst conquer. Sin and Satan and the grave. Sin and Satan and the grave. When I tread the verge of Jordan. So this is you know when I'm. He's called on God all his life.

To hold him firm and to be his strength. He knows he can't do it on his own. And then he says when I tread the verge of Jordan. When I die. Bid my anxious fears subside.

Death of deaths and hell's destruction. Land me safe on Canaan's side. Songs of praises. Songs of praises. I will ever give to thee. And the final verse.

[39 : 51] Musing on my habitation. Musing on my heavenly home. Fills my soul with holy longings. Come my Jesus quickly come. Vanity is all I see.

Lord I long to be with thee. Lord I long to be with thee. I had a friend who was preaching on the second coming. This last little while.

And I saw him at a clergy conference. The other day. He said why is it. That we don't sing. About the second coming any longer. Why is it that we don't sing about heaven very much.

It's a very good question isn't it. You see. That's what we're aiming for. Rest. Rest in the presence of God. Bought by the precious blood of Jesus.

Let us encourage each other day after day. Lest any of us. Be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. That's your job friends. Encourage each other day by day.

[40 : 49] Lest we be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Probably we don't have time for questions. I'll pray. Father God.

Thank you so much for this book. Though we struggle to read it. We thank you for the great treasures it has. And we thank you for its importance in the whole of the Bible. Please teach us more about it.

That we might enter your rest. And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.