

A Sermon About Five Women

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn together for a short time to Numbers 27, Numbers chapter 27, looking at this passage we read, verses 1 to 11.

And so the study, the sermon tonight is about five women. Isn't it good when you can come to the Bible and find that kind of topic where we're confining our thoughts to what's said of these five women, these daughters of Zelophehad?

And as we see, the census that was taken here, the list that was taken just prior to them crossing and entering into the land of promise, was a census which is compared to the one that was taken in the wilderness of Sinai, just before they set out on their journey towards the promised land.

And the striking detail there is that only two of the names on that initial census in the wilderness of Sinai remained to be included in this list here in the plains of Moab.

And the reason for that, of course, is that, as the Lord had said, due to the rebellion of the people and due to the refusal of the people to accept the good report that the searchers out of the land had brought back in Numbers 14, you'll find that detail there, the Lord had said that none of them would enter into the land of promise because they, through their unbelief, had rebelled against the Lord and his wisdom and his faithfulness and his promise to give them the land.

[1 : 41] And so we come to that list, and in that list you then find this Manasseh, the tribe of Manasseh, and these daughters of Zelophehad who belonged to that tribe.

Their family belonged to that tribe, and they came to Moses and set out their concern. Now, behind this you find, up to this point, the transfer or the succession of land for families was something which passed to the older son when the father died.

And that, of course, was very much the case in the Old Testament age, and in this time it was the case until this moment when the daughters of Zelophehad came to Moses, and he had to consult the Lord as to what to do because their father had died, and they were the only remaining members of that family.

So the question for Moses was, does the inheritance pass to them because they're not male, and if not, what's to be done about it?

Now, behind that as well, we need to remember something about the land that God was going to give them, the land of Canaan, which is described as the people's inheritance. But it's actually God's land, and God gave them that as a gift, and he made it clear to them all the way through his dealings with them that it was he who was giving them this gift of this inheritance of the land of Canaan.

[3 : 13] This was his land, as all the world was his, but he was specially concerned to gift this land to them for an inheritance. And because it really belonged ultimately to the Lord, they were never to think of it as transferable.

They were not to think of it as private property, which could be transferred if it were private property as they themselves saw fit. Because it belonged to the Lord, their dealings with the land and how the Lord had arranged the matter for the different tribes had to reflect the fact that because the land was God's, it was not to be transferred as if it were just their own property.

So that too lies behind the way that this passage actually brings out to us how Moses came to solve this problem or brought it to the Lord for a solution.

This was a dilemma that faced these five women because they came before Moses and said, Our father died in the wilderness. He wasn't among the company of those who gathered themselves against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin.

And he had no sons. Now ordinarily up to this point, the name of the father, which was attached to the family portion of the inheritance, would not actually pass to his daughters.

[4 : 40] So the question is, what is going to be done with the land, seeing there are no sons left to inherit it? And Moses brings it to the Lord. But there are five points, at least five points.

You'll find others, I'm sure, yourselves as you study the passage. Five points for us tonight just to take from this that also apply to ourselves. Because numbers, as indeed all of the Old Testament is, but numbers because it's really the book of the journeys of the people of Israel and their experiences of the journey and the faithfulness of God especially as they go through various experiences and events, that's really what comes across so much to us as you read through the book of Numbers.

And no less so in this passage is that the case. So there are five points, five principles, if you like. And as we go through these five points, bear in mind that they are also principles that are found throughout the book of Numbers as the Lord instructed the people and as that is now passed on to us from these words of what is now Scripture as God's Word to us.

The first point is this. Here were five women who trusted the Word of God. They trusted God's Word, particularly the Word of promise regarding the land that He had promised to give to the people of Israel.

No, they had not yet entered the land. And bear in mind that they are there just approaching the point at which they will cross over the Jordan and into the land to take possession of it.

[6 : 12] They haven't done that. They had to face opposition yet before they could settle in the land. They had to meet with people who didn't want them to populate the land and take over the land.

But here were five women who weren't questioning whether or not that was going to take place. They were sure it was because what they were saying is we wish to have our fathers' inheritance if possible when we settle in the land.

And you can see the deliberate emphasis there in verse 2. They stood before Moses and before Eliezer the priest and before the chiefs and all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

Now why is that mentioned? What's the significance of that point? Well surely it's at least this that here was a place where everybody could hear and see what was going on and where the Lord through this event was actually teaching the whole gathering of the people about the points that we're going to bring out the first of them being here were people these women who trusted the Lord. The whole people were hearing of these women and their confidence that they were indeed going to settle the land and because they were going to settle in the land as God had promised they wanted this matter dealt with in the sure and certain knowledge that God would fulfill his promise.

[7 : 35] They had been waiting 40 years. They had been traveling 40 years. They were living by the promise of God for that time and now they saw that that promise was about to be fulfilled.

So they came to Moses and in a way of public witness if you like this was speaking to the people of the faithfulness of God. They don't mention the faithfulness of God as such.

They're not saying to the people we believe the Lord is faithful and therefore he's going to give us this land but the way they're acting and what they're saying to Moses and the request makes it plain that that's what they believe.

that they have not been diverted from the truth of God's promise by anything that has happened during these years in the wilderness.

And there are times when you and I sometimes find ourselves deflected somewhat from just holding on tightly to the promise of God. There are things which happen to you in your experience throughout the course of life which cause you to be at times perhaps perplexed or perhaps questioning the reality of God's promises even.

[8 : 50] There are things which cause us at times to just stop and wonder is God indeed going to be true to his promise about me to bring me finally to my rest in heaven?

And can I really have confidence that I have an inheritance in the Lord when such things are happening to me in God's providence as cause me such pain and trauma from time to time?

And here are five women who are saying to us trust the word of God. Whatever things happen in your feelings in your experience in your daily life in the providence of God wherever God is saying something in his word that is a definite promise to you as his people that is going to be fulfilled.

God is committed to that. Christ died to make that promise secure. Nothing's going to divert him so why should it divert us from accepting the truth of whatever promises God has given us?

The first point is trust in God's word. The second point is respect God's judgments. You see they mention here that our father died in the wilderness.

[10:09] He was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah but died for his own sins and he had no sons.

Now why do they mention that? Well because the sons the company of Korah as you find back in Numbers 16 as they rebelled against Moses and against his authority and really in doing that they rebelled against God and God punished them.

The earth swallowed them alive as you remember the detail of it there and they therefore had no inheritance to pass on to their descendants.

So therefore what they are saying to Moses is yes our father died in the wilderness but he was not part of that rebellion. He did not come under the punishment of God by leaving us without an inheritance.

He was not one of the company of Korah and therefore the property that belongs to us as a family was not actually given over as it was for those who rebelled against the Lord.

[11:17] and that's why they are repeating this emphasis that he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah.

He was not a rebel he was not someone who rose up against what God himself had set out in Moses and in the leadership of the time. Now what is that reminding the people of?

Again it's not made specific but just as the previous point of trusting in God's word was something that people heard and could take from what they saw in these five women so also the fact that they mention this is a reminder to all the people as they gather there of the seriousness of sin against the Lord of the seriousness of dismissing the Lord's commands the seriousness of not respecting the judgments of the Lord and that comes across to the people as they mention Korah and his rebellion and what happened to those who were involved in that uprising which was effectively against the Lord.

Now why does the Lord do that to us? Well to remind us throughout his word and throughout our experiences that we require to be holy to the Lord who is holy that we require to commit ourselves to holiness of life each day and it's so obvious in the Bible and let me just pick out one book in the Bible where that is where it's punctuated by these references to reminding us of our need to be holy and indeed reminding us of the examples we have in the Old Testament in the people of Israel and the consequences of them rebelling against the Lord.

Hebrews chapter 2 verses 1 to 4 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it for since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

[13:33] Or you go to chapter 4 after he's been speaking about the rest that God's people have he then says in chapter 4 Therefore while the promise of entering his rest still stands let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it for good news came to us just as to them and by them he mentions those he means those he mentions in the previous chapter those who rebelled against Moses those with whom he was provoked was it not with those who sinned whose bodies fell in the wilderness so he swore to them that they would not enter into his rest so he's saying therefore while this promise stands for us to enter into the rest of God we have to also fear lest any of us should seem to come short of it for the good news came to us just as to them but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened for we who have believed enter that rest as he has said and that fits in very much with that emphasis there or what comes across there from the daughters of Salafahad to the gathered congregation there they trust the Lord's word they respect the Lord's judgments thirdly we find in the passage an emphasis on seeking the Lord's help they came to Moses

Moses Moses being such a man of stature as he was such a strong leader such a man of faith and of trust in the Lord a man who knew the Lord so closely and so well you might think that he would be able certainly in a short space of time just to give them a solution to their question and to their situation to their dilemma but he didn't have an answer he didn't know what to do himself so what he did was what all of us have to do and that is to bring his case their case before the Lord Moses went to the Lord with this matter and it's actually part of the stature of the man that he was strong enough and godly enough to confess I don't know what to do about this but I'll take it to the Lord and that's what we have to do as well because we are certainly much less than Moses was and

there'll be situations in life that we don't have answers to and there'll be situations for us as church leaders here tonight as leaders in the congregation as elders and ministers of the congregation when things will be brought to us that we don't have a direct answer to and we don't really know how to deal with immediately and we may be lost for words let alone a solution what do we do with it we bring it to the Lord the same in principle and practice as what Moses actually here did and the people were being taught by Moses own actions that all our dilemmas and all our situations that require to be dealt with and an answer to be found to them you have to bring them to the Lord you have to bring them out in the presence of the Lord he brought their case before the Lord he specified it before the Lord you can just imagine Moses going to the Lord he would not be dealing with generalities he would be specifically referring to this dilemma that he faced that he didn't have an answer to and before the Lord he would be spelling it out in detail

Lord this is what I need your help with show me what to do and that's seeking God's help even by the likes of Moses now Moses did that three times recorded for us in the book of Numbers the first one is in chapter nine where you find that Moses brought to the Lord the fact the matter of someone who had been defiled by contact with a dead body and the question was what then happens in regard to the Passover is this man to be allowed to keep the Passover or not that was the issue then and in chapter nine and verse eight you read the same thing there that Moses said wait that I may hear what the Lord will command concerning you these men who had become unclean ceremonially by contact with a dead body and then you find chapter 15 you find again that Moses is confronted there with another situation where you find him in chapter 15 and at verse 34 where the question then is

Sabbath breaker they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day and those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron to all the congregation they put him in custody because it had not been made clear what should be done to him and the Lord said to Moses this man shall be put to death that was a very difficult passage and it's a very difficult passage to explain to people who are against the Bible especially but it's even difficult for ourselves to understand that sort of response on the part of the Lord to this situation but it does remind us among many other things that the Lord will not barter his holiness and the holiness of his commands and the holiness of his cause whatever situation we make for ourselves in transgressing them it's of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed he hasn't deviated from his holiness just because he doesn't strike us down for our sins but as difficult as the passage is the point we're mentioning tonight is that the Lord revealed to Moses what to do

Moses brought it again to the Lord and it's something that we ourselves of course need to apply constantly to our lives as Christians because we live in a world that's really set on self determination of how to live their lives and that is something that constantly seeps into the church visibly the church of God in this world that spirit of self determination of really being independent of anybody else's suggestions even or certainly commands or instructions as to what to do in their lives and how to lead their lives and how to live their lives we're faced with that spirit of self determination whether it's in certain groups that group themselves together in whatever cause it is they represent or individuals that say no I'm in charge of my own life or a group that says this is how we are determined to live our lives and the church especially has no right to tell us how to live and what we ought to do with our behavior self determination must never be an aspect of our relationship with the

[20 : 58] Lord we take it to the Lord we trust his word we respect his judgments we seek his help we don't prioritize our own views ahead of or above his fourthly the importance of knowing God's will now we've said Moses brought this to the Lord he brought their case before the Lord and the Lord said to Moses the daughters of Zelophehad are right you shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them and then he set out the rule for Moses to tell the people this is how it must be from now on specifying what would happen firstly if the man died without a son and then if there was no daughter and then if he had no brothers and so on all the way through you will give it to the nearest kinsman and he shall possess it in other words the land of each family was not to be taken out of the possession of that family or of that tribe it had to be kept and wasn't to be passed over to another tribe we'll come to that in a minute when we mention what happened near the end of the chapter the end of the book of numbers so you see

Moses again he didn't use his own wisdom or his own view of what would happen he took it to the Lord and this is what the Lord actually revealed to him now the point is that around the people of Israel this kind of solution was already in place quite clear from what we learn from history that other nations other pagan nations around them had very similar rules to what the Lord is actually here specifying for Israel but he's specifying it for Israel for the first time and Moses you can imagine the kind of man he was he would have known much about the practice and the customs of the nations around about them but that was not good enough for him just because it was done elsewhere it didn't mean that inevitably that meant it should apply to Israel and what is it we learn from that well for Moses the fact that it was done elsewhere by other people in this way was not a safe conclusion for him to say well this is how it has to be for us as well he had to know the Lord's will in it and he had to keep to the Lord's will once the Lord had made his will known and revealed that to him and the point is that we are living also in days not only when the culture around us in the world is very hostile to the gospel and hostile to gospel standards and to gospel ways of living the fact is that some of that prevailing culture and the unbelief of the world has made its way into the church as well and you and I must always beware of the danger of contemporary culture giving shape to the church rather than the other way about where the church through the gospel seeks to bring a proper shape to the culture around them we must never say that just because things happen to work as human beings devise it in the visible church if you like in the widest sense or in the world or in big business or wherever let's do that and bring it into the church and it'll work there after all we're just another society of human beings why shouldn't it work here if it works in business if it works in the world why shouldn't it work in the church because the Lord has not revealed it to be his will that's why and God in setting various structures and various ways for the church to live out its life under him and in the gospel it means that we are charged by God as Christians to bring that gospel and our own lives as we seek to reflect that gospel and its values to the world around us to be shaped in a good way to reflect that God in his values and in his commands and in his promises in the culture of the gospel that's why we're facing the kind of problems that we're up against locally as well because that world out there does not understand why we cannot be shaped by their thinking why we cannot allow ourselves to let go of principles and practices that are obviously God's will and the moment we do that we're allowing ourselves as the church to be shaped by the prevailing culture which is not a problem if that prevailing culture is godly and gospel supportive but that's not what it is that's hardly ever what it is and here is an emphasis to us as well that knowing God's will means whatever is the case and happens to be attractive or even in a worldly sense profitable unless it is God's will unless it is specified as pleasing to him then it must not shape our lives and we must try as far as we can under God and by his grace and by his help to actually bring the shape of the gospel and the shape of godliness to bear upon the world around us and I hope the young folks here tonight and it's always great to see young folks of course at the prayer meeting as well as other times as they face the problems that young folks face and those of us who are older acknowledge and I'm sure that the young generation rising up today face problems that we did not have to face that we even hadn't envisaged facing when we were their age but I would say to them just as I say to myself and to all of us who are older don't let the world and its shape bring that shape into your life you maintain your relationship with Jesus your confidence in God's word your respect for God's judgment your seeking of God's help for your life and your knowledge of God's will in the Bible as what is right for you to apply in your life too and we will help each other in seeking to apply God's will through the word to our lives too the fifth thing along with trusting God's word respecting God's judgment seeking God's help and knowing

[28 : 10] God's will is obeying God's commands here was God giving these instructions and commands to Israel it shall be for the people of Israel a statute and a rule as the Lord commanded Moses now in chapter 36 we find the daughters of Silophah had mentioned again and the problem there is as you come to chapter 36 and what happens if they marry into another tribe because they belong to the tribe of Manasseh and if they marry into another tribe what then is going to happen to the land that's their inheritance does it get transferred so that then belongs to the tribe their husband belongs to does it stay within the tribe of which they are a member and the solution was again when Moses commanded the people there the tribe of the people of Joseph is right verse 5 there of chapter 36 this is what the

Lord commands concerning the daughters of Silophah had let them marry whom they think best only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father the inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers and every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Israel shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his father so that was the Lord's solution again so you see the daughters of Silophah had through their faith in God and their trust in God and indeed the courage that that gave them as they came forward which would not be an easy thing for them to do as they came forward there to Moses and in front of all the people set out their dilemma and their question they were the means then of providing for Israel these rules these requirements that God set with regard to inheritance and marriage within the tribe from that time onwards so it was through their courage that the

Lord actually used that to bring about these rules for them and every time you find the Lord setting out rules whether it's that kind of rule or regulation contrary to what many people will tell you today we don't like rules and we don't like commands don't like to be instructed especially if it's from the Bible the Lord's the Lord's commands and the Lord's regulations the Lord's intention in all of that is for justice for harmony for order for peace that's why he gave these to Israel and that's why we have them as well and that's why Jesus said to his disciples before he went out to die if you love me you will keep my commandments may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let's conclude our service this evening singing in psalm 146 page 191 verses 1 to 6 praise the Lord my soul oh praise him I'll extol him all my days while I live to God my savior from my heart I will sing praise 146 and verses 1 to 6 on page 191 praise the Lord my soul oh praise him I'll extol him all my days while I live to God my savior from my heart I will sing praise do not put your trust in princes mortal men who cannot save all their plans will come to nothing when they perish in the grace blessed is the one who truly looks for help to Jacob's God blessed is the one who places all his hope upon the Lord he he who made the earth and heaven and the seas with all their store he who keeps us every promise who is paid for nevermore his knowing he who lives the man match who is frâ helps his trip to their memories that they said him she r