

"Fresh Beginnings"

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[0:00] Well, good morning, church. It's good to see you all on this rainy Sunday. Would you turn with me to the book of Numbers. This summer we've been traveling through this! great Old Testament book, seeing God's faithfulness and seeing His holy presence among His people throughout their wilderness journey. And today, we're actually going to wrap up our series by considering the very last big portion of this book, chapters 26 through 36. So, would you turn with me to chapter 26 of the book of Numbers? That begins on page 125 or 126 of the Pew Bible.

We're not going to put it on the screens above, so if you want to turn there in the Pew Bible, that would be great. If you're new to Trinity, this morning's sermon is going to be a little out of the ordinary for us. Typically, our practice on Sundays is to take a portion of Scripture and walk through it fairly closely, trying to capture the main point of the text in the main point of what we speak and teach and reflect on. Today, we're taking a bigger chunk of Scripture, so we're going to be flying at a little bit of a higher altitude and seeing how this section of Scripture connects to some of the great themes of redemption all the way through the Old Testament and the New Testament. So, Numbers, chapters 26 through 36. Let me pray for us as we come to God's Word.

Our Lord in heaven above, Lord, we do come to You this morning. Lord, we come expectantly because You, our triune God, our speaking God, that You, in Your kindness and grace, have communicated Yourself to us, not just through the prophets and the apostles, but ultimately in Your Son, Jesus Christ. So, we pray that by Your Spirit, as we come to Your Word written this morning, You would continue to enlighten our eyes, our hearts to hear what Your Word says to us today, that we might see Christ and worship Him and follow Him as Your people in this world that You have made. Father, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, let's turn to Numbers 26.

I'm going to read portions of this just to get us started. So, Numbers 26, verse 1, After the plague, the Lord said to Moses and to Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel from twenty years old and upward by their fathers' houses, all in Israel who are able to go to war. And Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, Take a census of the people from twenty years old and upward as the Lord commanded Moses. The people of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt were... And then if you scan down through verses 5 through 51, you'll see just that. There's this census of the tribes, Reuben and Simeon, Gad and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, the two tribes stemming from Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali. And then we pick up in verse 51, this was the list of the people of Israel, 601,730. The Lord spoke to Moses saying,

Among these the land shall be divided for inheritance according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance.

[3:28] Every tribe shall be given its inheritance in proportion to its list. But the land shall be divided by lot according to the names of the tribes of their fathers, they shall inherit.

Their inheritance shall be divided according to lot between the larger and the smaller. And then the chapter goes on and says, This was the list of the Levites according to their clans.

And then in verses all the way from 57 through 62, we see the tribe of Levi counted and their special role of serving as priests and servants to the Lord in the tabernacle. And then the chapter concludes in verse 63 and following, These were those listed by Moses and Eleazar the priest who listed the people of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan and Jericho. But among these, there was not one of those listed by Moses and Aaron the priest who had listed the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai.

For the Lord had said to them, They shall die in the wilderness. Not one of them was left except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun. Okay, so chapter 26 of the book of

Numbers marks this fresh beginning for the people of Israel. For 40 years, they had been wandering in the wilderness, as that last paragraph alludes to. They'd been wandering in the wilderness as a result of their unbelief. God had promised them that they would enter the land that He had given them, that He would go before them. And tragically, the people turned away in unbelief. And as a result, they were forced to wander in the wilderness until all of that generation died. But now, a new generation has risen up.

And again, just as this book of Numbers began, so it concludes with a census of the people, with a counting of the people of God, the people being counted and organized to enter the land and to receive their inheritance. Now, we're not going to read the rest of chapters 27 through 36. We don't have time for that this morning. But if you go home and you were to read through those chapters, you'd see that much of these chapters at the end of Numbers, much of these chapters are concerned with preparing the people for life in the promised land. God will instruct through Moses different routines of regular worship daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally, the different Sabbaths and feasts and festivals. These chapters will take up the boundaries of the land just where they can expect God will settle them and inherit them. These coming chapters will talk about cleansing idolatry out of the land and making it a place where the Lord alone is worshiped. And these chapters will talk about planning out cities of refuge where people who are in trouble or need justice can flee to.

[6 : 25] These chapters will talk about the principles of fair inheritance and what vow-keeping and justice will look like in the land. You see, most of these chapters here at the end of Numbers are forward-looking to their inheritance in the land. God sets their sights on what's ahead of them, sets their sights on the fresh beginning that He has in store for them. So, this is where the story of Numbers ends.

The renewed people on the verge of the promised land, a people literally born anew in the wilderness, looking ahead to their inheritance. Now, as the New Testament looks back to this moment in redemptive history, it sees a picture of what has come to fulfillment in the church. What is the church of Jesus Christ? Friends, we are the people who have been born anew in the wilderness and who look ahead to God's promised inheritance. What was true of Old Testament Israel so many years ago has now come to fulfillment in the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Israel's Messiah, the world's true Lord. He has brought these plans to fulfillment. Think about it. Just as God's Old Testament people were chosen, so now God's New Testament people are chosen in Christ. Just as God's Old Testament people were redeemed from slavery in Egypt, so God's New Testament people have been redeemed from a deeper slavery to sin and death when Christ died to forgive all of our sins. And just as God's Old Testament people were granted an inheritance by grace when they trusted God's promise in the wilderness, the same is true for God's New Testament people. We look ahead to an inheritance given to us by grace. Listen again to how Paul describes it in verses 13 through 14 of Ephesians 1 that we read earlier. Paul says, in Christ, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in Jesus, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory. So you see, like that new generation in Numbers 26, so we, the church, likewise look ahead to the promise of God's inheritance. But of course, it's not an earthly or this age inheritance that we look forward to. The promised land in the Old Testament, you see, was always a shadow. It was always a type. It was always a pointer to an even greater inheritance for God's people. What God ultimately planned for His people was not just a few acres on the west side of the Jordan River. The ultimate inheritance of God's redeemed people is nothing less than a new heavens and a new earth, a completely renewed creation free from sin and death.

That is the inheritance that God has in store for His people. So when we read the end of the book of Numbers in light of its fulfillment in the New Testament, we see that this fresh beginning that we read of wasn't just a reality for God's people long ago.

It's the story of the church right now. Again, listen to how Peter, Peter describes it in his first letter. In 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 3 through 5, he says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He's caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Born again to a living hope through the resurrection

of Jesus Christ from the dead. I want to use those lines from Peter. I want to use that apostolic lens to draw out the implication of Numbers 26 through 36 for us today with our time together. The first thing we see here is that God's people have been born again. In Numbers, as we said, the people had literally been born again, right? By Numbers 26, the generation that came out of Egypt in the Exodus had all perished in the wilderness just like God said they would in judgment because they refused to believe His promise.

[11:13] But the new generation, the generation that for the most part was basically born in the wilderness, now stood on the verge of the promised land. And all of this demonstrates that God has remained faithful to His promises. He's preserved His people. The failure of the previous generation did not define or need to define the new generation, a new start, a fresh beginning was being made. And friends, the same is true for every Christian today, but it's even more radical, you see, in light of the new covenant.

For what the gospel offers us isn't just a fresh start from the failures and flaws of the generations that have come before us, right? The gospel comes to us with the good news that there can be a fresh start from your own moral failures and flaws.

You see, in a sense, we are all just like that first generation in the wilderness. Like that first generation, we don't want to hear God's promise and believe in our natural self. Like that first generation, we'd rather do things our own way and think that that will be better and safer. And as a result of that, we wander in the wilderness of our own making and stand under God's judgment. You see, we have our own moral failures and flaws. In reality, we aren't any better than the generations that have come before us. Isn't it easy, right, to see the flaws of our parents or grandparents, right? You know, if you've ever talked to, you know, a grandparent and they say things and you're like, oh, I don't think we should say things like that, right?

You know? It's easy to see the flaws of those generations that have come before, but the truth is, friends, our kids and our grandkids and the coming generations will look back at us and they will think the same thing. Here's the truth. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. None of us is righteous. But the good news is that God, our creator, yes, against whom we have sinned, is a gracious God, a God who delights in mercy, a God who displays the wonder of his matchless glory in the forgiveness of sins. And how does God accomplish this?

Well, do you remember the first thing that happens in Jesus' ministry after his baptism, after he goes through the waters? What happens? Well, a number of the gospel writers tell us that the Spirit drives him where? Into the wilderness. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus willingly goes into the wilderness. He willingly goes out into the place of our unbelief and rebellion.

[14:21] And what does he do there? Well, you remember the story. Satan comes to him and tempts him. Satan comes and tempts the Lord Jesus, we might say, to sort of take a shortcut, right? Don't trust and obey God. Just make some bread and satisfy yourself. Or do something spectacular and make a name for yourself. Or, look, give up on God and God's kingdom. Choose the kingdoms of this world instead.

And friends, unlike every generation that came before him, Jesus did in that moment what no one had ever done. He completely and fully and perfectly obeyed the Father's will. You see, Jesus went into the wilderness for us so that his obedience could undo our disobedience. So that his obedience in that moment and the moments of his entire earthly ministry, so that his obedience could mean a new beginning for everyone who trusts in him.

But you see, that's not all. At the end of Jesus' ministry, he willingly goes outside again into an even greater and darker wilderness. He willingly goes to the cross, and in that wilderness undergoes the penalty for our human sin. He dies the death that we deserve to die. But his death is not the end. Three days later, the Father raised Christ from the dead, and by his resurrection, it's not just the failures of your parents or grandparents, but the failures of you, your own failures and your own sins.

Those don't need to define you anymore. You see, there's a break now in Christ between your old life and your new. There's a new day. You know, that's why the outward sign of becoming a Christian, the outward sign of that is baptism. Right? Why did Jesus command everyone who believes in him to also be baptized? Well, baptism is the perfect display of what is true for everyone who comes to saving faith in him. Just as Jesus died and rose again, so in baptism we go down into the water and come back up again to signify that through faith in him. Our old nature has died and our new life has begun. It's the ultimate fresh beginning in Christ our Lord.

[17:22] But, you know, here's the good news about the good news. Most fresh starts over time start to lose their luster, don't they? You know? If you've ever painted a room in your house, you know this. You know, you walk into your, whatever, your living room one day and you're like, man, these walls are kind of old and dingy, right? Who picked this color beige, right? So you get a bit of fresh coat of paint and then it looks great. It's shiny and new for a while. But over time, the scuffs and the dust start to accumulate.

And after a while, it doesn't seem so fresh anymore. How often are our attempts at sort of self-moral reform like that, right? Today I'm going to try to be a better person. We kind of go for a little bit and then it sort of peters out.

Is that what Christ has done for us? Is the Christian life like that? Does Jesus sort of clean us up once and then sort of set us loose and we're on our own after that? Is it something that we can somehow lose?

Can we somehow lose this new beginning and go back to the old? Well, here's the good news, friends. What Jesus has done, when Jesus saves you, there is no undoing it.

In John 10, Jesus will say that the Father has given him all that are his and he holds them in his hand and no one can take us out of it. And Paul says that God has promised to bring to completion the good work that he began. God preserves and keeps all of his children, you see. He is faithful.

[19:31] He will do it. Here is the fresh start. It never fades. So this is the first thing we see. God's people have been born again.

The second thing is that God's people have been born again to a living hope. To a living hope. In Numbers, the new generation looked ahead to the promised land. Now, some of that generation were perhaps old enough to remember sort of their earliest childhood days in Egypt, but most of them had spent their entire lives in the wilderness. They were wandering nomads without a place to rest for 40 years, persecuted and oppressed by the peoples they encountered along the way, afflicted by the heat of sun during the day and the bitter cold at night.

This was their everyday existence. But now, a new horizon opens before them. What lies before them is a home, a place where God will remove idolatry and false worship and where there will be peace and righteousness and rest.

They look ahead and they look ahead with hope. And so too, friends, the church today looks ahead with living, vibrant hope.

And that hope is living in the sense that it's never going to go away. It's a hope that's not going to disappoint. It's not a hope that's going to peter out and die. Why? Because our ultimate hope is not in this age, you see.

[21:17] Our hope is not in the machinations of a nation or a particular political movement. Our hope is not in the amount of wealth that we can accumulate. Our hope is not in the amount of prolonged health that we can somehow stimulate.

In his second letter, the apostle Peter writes, but according to God's promise, we're waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

You see, when Christ rose from the grave, it was the sign and the seal that God's promise of a new creation, a creation healed of all the effects of sin, would be fulfilled.

In his own body, Christ our Lord began the new creation, began it, and nothing was going to turn it back, you see. And that new creation will be fulfilled when he returns in glory to make all things new.

And then those who have hoped in Christ will also be raised in resurrection bodies like his, the New Testament says. And we will dwell forever in God's presence in a world healed of all sin and death and decay, where there's no more idolatry and falsehood, where there's no more war, where there's no more greed, where there's no more greed.

[23:09] And realize that there is an inheritance coming. First Peter says that it's an inheritance that's imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Now surely an earthly inheritance is a good thing, right? It's a wonderful gift to receive if you've received an earthly inheritance. But even the greatest earthly inheritance, friends, will one day perish and fade.

But what God has in store for His children will never perish and never fade. In fact, what God has in store for His people will grow sweeter and richer as time goes on.

Right? For in the new heavens and in the new earth, our greatest joy, do you know what our greatest joy in our coming inheritance will be?

It is going to be our unceasing communion with the triune God. And because God is infinite in beauty and wisdom and goodness, there will be no end to our increasing delight as we increase in our knowledge of Him.

[24 : 45] You know, maybe you're like me, maybe you like music, but you're not a classically trained musician. So sometimes when you hear classical pieces, you think, huh, that's a bit abstract, right?

So what do we do in those instances? We take a music appreciation course and we learn a little bit, right? Or you go to an art museum and you look at the pieces of the wall and you're like, I don't get it, right? But then you take an art appreciation course and you start to see things in it.

It puts it in context and you're like, oh, that's actually pretty stunning. You know, or maybe you go see some of these pieces that you've seen in books. Maybe you go see them in person and you think, oh, that Jackson Pollock painting that looks sort of just like splatters of paint on a canvas. That's actually pretty powerful. As we learn a little more, we start to appreciate more. It starts to fill us more. Friends, if that is true, if that is true of mere human products of beauty, imagine what it will be like in heaven when our appreciation classes of our triune God never end.

In the never-ending wisdom and beauty of God. We will be caught up in the beauties of God.

[26 : 22] God carried up freely and willingly by the rushing winds of His love. Psalm 16 says of God, In your presence, God, there's fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Friends, this is the real inheritance. To enjoy God forevermore. But this certain hope, this certain hope of our future inheritance through the resurrection of Jesus, it doesn't give us, it doesn't just give us strength to endure through trials, right?

It also gives us motivation and direction to walk in the ways of love and obedience now. What is the Christian life?

The Christian life ultimately is living the life of the world to come right now in the present. The church is a colony of heaven.

It is the future come into the present to show the world what's really to come. So we pattern our lives together in the church, not after the wilderness, but we pattern our lives after the inheritance.

[27 : 48] And as you walk through Numbers 26 through 36, you see what does God emphasize? He starts to emphasize wholehearted worship of Him, where even the structure of our time takes shape around loving and knowing Him as God.

You see God emphasize the value of keeping our vows and promises, being people of our word now, being people of truth and integrity now in a world full of falsehood.

You see God in these chapters emphasize mercy and forgiveness and protection as He tells them to set up cities of refuge throughout the land where those who have been caught up in accidental things can flee from mercy and justice and protection.

So we are a people of mercy and forgiveness and care. For the people of Israel, God was telling them this was life in the land to come.

And that is true for us today. The church is the place where we worship God wholeheartedly and we extend mercy and forgiveness and we speak the truth and we keep our promises and we invite others to join us.

[29 : 02] To join us under the reign of this good and faithful King Jesus to receive the new life of His forgiveness and to be together a people of living hope.

Friends, doesn't the world that we live in need a people of living hope? Friends, don't the world that we live in need a people of living hope?

Under the unfurling banner of His sovereign saving grace? That's where we're headed in the months to come. But here in Numbers, here in Numbers it ends with this great hope that God is rescuing His people through the wilderness and the promise of His inheritance is sure.

Friend, do you know the reality of this fresh beginning for yourself? Do you have the joy of this living hope?

Call out to the risen Lord Jesus. Put your hope afresh in Him. Everyone who receives Him in faith, Jesus says, I will not cast you out. I will embrace you and make you my own. Let's pray together.

[30 : 49] Father in heaven, we thank you for the rich inheritance that you have promised us, your people. God, thank you that there's coming a day when all of your glorious promises will come true, when the earth will indeed be covered with your glory like the waters cover the sea.

And God, thank you for the foretaste of these things that we see as your church spreads throughout every corner of your globe. Lord, even as we've prayed this morning for other churches in our region and in our country and in the world, Lord, we see the advance of your kingdom.

And along with the church of every place and of every age, we say, come, Lord Jesus, complete the good work that you've begun. And as you tarry, we pray that your word would go out, Lord, calling and drawing all your people to yourself. Father, I pray for my friends and my brothers and sisters in this room this morning that we would hear that call, respond in faith, Lord, and that we would walk in the newness of life by your Spirit. We pray all this, Jesus, in your mighty name. Amen.