



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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NUMBERS 17

Numbers Series

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come here to church, not because of the building, stained glass windows, or pews, we come because we know that the church is people and you're working in people's hearts and you want to work in our hearts. We come to connect with you. Yet we can connect with you outside of this building or on our own. But we come because we know something special happens here when you bring your church together, and that is something powerful. Your Spirit works among us and encourages and inspires us. People use their gifts that you've given to them, and as a result we're all edified by that. So we come, Lord, to you, thanking you for your church and we are here expecting you to work in our lives. We come here to serve you and not just to be served. We ask, Lord, that you would do what you always do with your church. Make it happen. Make it happen today, make it happen this week.

Lord, we ask that we would be the church that you've called us to be. We know that the instruction manual for your church is your word, so we come now to your word and look at it and try to glean some truths from it that you have prepared for us from times past for today. We know the applications that we have today will be different from next week, but we're asking for today that you would give us today our daily bread, that we today would be able to walk out of this place with what we need in order to serve you more, to trust you more, and to know you more. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Well I'm going to take a break from the book of Numbers starting next week. We'll come back to it. I really had planned to go through the book of Numbers by now. It has thirty-six chapters in it and we have now arrived at chapter 17. I didn't quite get as far as I thought. I thought we'd take two or three chapters at some points, but every time I get into it I find a new truth and I go, "We cannot keep going. We've got to stop and park here and understand this truth." So we are in chapter 17 today and then we're going to leave the book of Numbers and start the book of Romans starting next week.

When we look at the book of Romans we're going to look at how God changes people and how God comes into a person's life certainly. But if you look at how people are changing or how people change, you want to understand what that looks like.

So we have to understand anthropology. Anthropology is the study of man, how God put a person together and what's inside. That their heart is the place where they process things and so on. So the heart is very important to understand. We're going to learn about how people change in the book of Romans.

We're also going to study theology. That's the study of God. Because change takes place most dominantly and most thoroughly when God is a picture of that change processed. It certainly wouldn't change things on the outside, but the book of Romans is about God coming inside of a person and empowering them with the Holy Spirit in their lives. Change takes place when that happens.

And then we learn in the later part of the book about the church and how powerful the church is, how God designed the church (spiritual gifts and so on) in order to be the place that God encourages change to take place. So it's going to be an exciting book for us to go in and study.

It's going to be an opportunity for you to learn more about the gospel because each week, starting next week, I'm going to share a piece of the gospel message with you so that you are prepared when someone says -- and I'm praying someone's going to ask you the question and make it really easy. They're going to say, "What does your church believe anyway?" Be ready for that question. Or "You're a Christian? What does that mean?" And when they ask you that question, I want you to have an answer.

So starting next week for the next several weeks I'm going to give you a piece of the gospel so that you're ready. If someone asks you that question, you need to have an answer for it. So I'm going to prepare you to have the answer so that you'll be able to share the gospel. Because I'm praying God's going to have someone ask you the question. When someone asks you the question, you want to be able to give the answer. That's where we're headed in the book of Romans.

But today I'd like to look at Numbers 17. I want to conclude this part of our study of Numbers. It's an important book. It's significant. It's the fourth book of the Old Testament.

In Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, God picks a family. He chooses Abraham, tells him to go across from the Ur of the Chaldees all the way over to the Promised Land and He starts working in that family. That family grows. So it's about choosing a family in the book of Genesis.

In the book of Exodus that family has now gone to Egypt, but they really don't have the identity that they need. God redeems them and He buys them out of exodus. So it's the redemption of the family in Exodus, who's now about two million people, big family.

Leviticus is about inspiring that family and helping that family understand the guidelines that will help them be successful in life. That is the book of Leviticus.

The book of Numbers is about organizing the family. Telling them how we do leadership here and about the different tribes and where they are to sleep and when they march, where they go, and how the tabernacle is in the center. So the organization of the family is described in the book of Numbers.

In Numbers 16, the passage we talked about last week, we have some significant disorganization in the family. We have Korah rebelling against the leadership, saying in his own mind, “You know, I think the ideas that God has are for people of old. They don’t apply to us today. I think any of us ought to be able to be priests. After all, we’re all God’s people. We’re all a part of the same family. We ought to be able to do this.” So Korah had his own ideas about what was necessary – that Moses wasn’t the only leader, that Aaron wasn’t the only priest, that any of us could be priests and go forward.

So God used a strategy, last week we saw, to teach the people and to train them. That strategy was correction, a very important strategy that God uses in our lives today. Parents use this strategy as they work with their children. Correction is an important tool. But it isn’t the only tool that’s used to change a person and what they believe and how they change their lives. Correction is only one tool of many.

Another tool that we can use is a tool of teaching or training. Chapter 17 of Numbers is teaching the same lesson that chapter 16 taught. Chapter 16 taught the lesson in terms of correction. Chapter 17 is going to reveal some new truth using an activity. It’s a great way that God is going to teach proactively here and people are going to understand a little bit more about what it looks like to see God and His practices. So He’s going to use an activity, a visual aid.

It’s great when we can show a picture or take a visual aid of some kind and illustrate a lesson. That often is a way that our children, or the people that we lead, can get the idea.

So Numbers 17:1 – *The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and get twelve staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes. Write the name of each man on his staff.”*

Now I’m sure you’ve seen pictures of the staff. So the staff is usually a long piece of wood that has a crook on it somehow so they can get the sheep. There’s also a rod. A rod is a shorter piece of wood used as a weapon. So that’s why in Psalm 23 it says, *I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me.* Why? Because they represent guidance and they represent protection. Guidance and protection in this rod or staff.

Now the word *rod and staff* in the Hebrew used in Psalm 23 are not the same word that’s used here. This is a synonym that could be either. That’s why in the King James Version and the New American Standard Version, if you have either of those, you’re going to see the word *rod*. If you have the ESV or the NIV, you’re going to see the word *staff*. Because it could be either. The idea is it’s a walking stick of some kind.

You’ve got people who do a lot of walking. You’ve got adults who are walking. Everybody had a rod of some kind. They had a stick that they would walk with. Even the kids I’m sure picked up sticks to emulate what their parents were doing because they’re walking everywhere. They have a walking stick. So it was their rod or their staff. Now that’s what we’re talking about here.

He takes a common thing that they have and He says to them, “I want you to write on them the name of the person here.” So they’ve got twelve tribes, each of you write your name of the staff.

So they took a stylus, or they took a rock, or they took some kind of a chisel, or something, and on the wooden rod that they had, each one wrote his name on it so they would know which one belonged to which person.

Verse 3: *“On the staff of Levi (that’s one of the twelve tribes) write Aaron’s name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe. Place them in the tent of meeting in front of the ark of the covenant law, where I meet with you. The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.”*

And why were they grumbling? They’re grumbling because they don’t like the leadership. It’s the same kinds of things we have in the family sometimes. “I don’t like the leadership.”

So God is saying I’m going to show them in a different way than correction now. I’m going to use an activity to teach them about the importance of submitting to leadership and that I have ordained leadership. Leadership is important and the ordination of leadership in our community, He’s saying, is ordained by me. So I’ve set it up here and so we’re going to take these twelve sticks, these twelve walking sticks, lay them in the front of the ark of the covenant, in the Most Holy Place, and leave them there for a day and see what happens.

He says the one that comes before me, the one that I’m going to favor is the one that the walking stick will sprout or it will have buds on it. That’s what he’s saying there. It will sprout. That means it’s going to have little green shoots come off of it, a dead stick. In other words, a miracle is going to take place. Life is going to come out of something that’s dead.

Only God can do that. And some of you know this – that your life was dead before you came into the presence of God. And when you come into the presence of God, God has made you alive. That’s what we’re seeing here in a very real way in this activity that’s being presented.

Now I’m convinced that activity is a great way to teach people. Whether it’s adults or children, activity is a great way. I’m going to do an activity with you today that’s going to make an impression on you. Probably the thing you’re going to walk out of here today with is not anything I’ve said so far, it’s going to be the activity because activities leave an impression on us.

I love to teach with activity. I teach parents around the country and often parents say out of our seminars, “The thing I got from you today is I need to go back and teach the Bible in creative ways.” Because I say to parents make it fun. You can sit around the table and read the Bible to your kids, but that’s a very adult way of learning. When Jesus passed the faith onto His disciples, He used creativity and life experience.

So I would suggest you run around the house and do a race. Take it from the passage in Hebrews 12. In Hebrews 12 it says that we put aside those things that get us into trouble, that sin that so easily entangles us and run the race with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

There's a lot of lessons in that story. There's the lesson that my eyes are fixed on Jesus instead of comparing myself to my brothers and sisters in sibling conflict. There's the illustration that I need to get rid of those things that encumber me, including the sin that so easily entangles us.

I say, "Dads, why don't you just tell your kids things you're working on in your life." You might say to your son, "Son, I'm trying to get rid of the sins that entangle us. I know we could all be sharing some of those things. Let me share with you one that maybe you could share as well. You know the other day when you spilled your milk and I grounded you for three months? That was a little bit of an exaggeration and I'm working on my anger so I don't react impulsively to you. What are some sins that entangle you here?"

It's really fun to watch children share in such ways. One child might say, "I'm working on not listening."

"That's right. We are helping you with obedience. I'm glad you shared that. And what are you working on, Mary?"

"Well, I'm working on lying."

"Yes, you're working on lying. Yes, I'm glad you're working on that. Because those things entangle us. They get in the way."

And then you might do an activity where you run around the house in an obstacle course. You go and touch this doorknob, and you run over here and go through these sets of chairs, and then you come over here and do a somersault and land in the living room. I'll time you how fast you can do that. Then put on Dad's baggy coat and Mom's big tennis shoes and then try to do it.

Then we sit down when it's all over with the kids and we say, "Was it easier to run the race with the baggy clothes on or not?" Everybody's laughing because it was so fun of an activity. "It was easier to run the race when we didn't have the baggy clothes on."

"Yes! That's why we want to get rid of the sin that so easily entangles us. That's why we're growing together in this family to be the family that God wants us to be." It's activity like that that makes an impression on people.

My dad used to do this with me and with the church. He was a pastor. He would say to the young people and it would be in the bulletin. "Mystery trip. Young people. Saturday. Nine o'clock." Where are we going? "Can't tell you. It's a mystery trip. Be there at nine o'clock. Bring your bathing suit and your tennis shoes." We didn't know what it was, but boy we would have a fun time. We were excited about going on a mystery trip. Of course my dad would do some teaching before we jumped in the lake or did a hike up into the waterfall or whatever. It was a lot of fun. It was activity.

That is the language of people that God is able to use. He uses it in this particular passage.

So we're going to do an activity. Take out your cell phone. Now you've got to tell me you didn't leave your cell phone home. Because like a rod you carry it wherever you go. So I wanted something really common like a rod. You've got your cell phone? Alright. Some of you didn't bring your cell phones or you're being disciplined right now and you don't have a cell phone right now. I understand.

Here's what I'd like you to do. I'd like you to stand up and get into groups of three or four with your cell phone, introduce yourself to those people, and I'm going to give you an instruction. Three or four people in a group with your cell phone.

Okay. Here's your assignment. I want you to tell other people in your group one thing you like about your cell phone or one thing you can do with your cell phone. I can tell you one thing I can do with mine. I can start my car out there with my cell phone. Okay. What can you do with yours? Share that around the group. What's one thing you like about your cell phone?

Alright. Let's go ahead and have a seat again.

Tell me. What are some things you can do with your cell phones? You can call your wife! Good. What else? Share pictures. Find a good place to eat. Listen to Charles Stanley. He's good. You can turn it off. Yeah. Sometimes you've just got to turn it off. Right? I tried to take a nap this week and I should have turned my phone off. I would've gotten some sleep. What? Yeah. You get the time. Okay. Cell phones are good for all kinds of things. On my cell phone I can adjust the thermostat in my house. I really like that.

Now I'm going to show you a verse and I'm going to tie this into a biblical truth because I'm not having you go home just to be excited about cell phones and technology. (Although it would've been fun to be back there with the tech group. What do they do with their cell phones?) But I want to show you a verse.

Do you ever get frustrated sometimes when you forget that there was a message there. Somebody left a message on your phone and you forgot it. Well I want you to know that there's a message waiting for you.

In Jeremiah 33:2-3 it says this: *This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it—Yahweh is his name.* In other words, if you're looking on your cell phone, if you're looking for which number that called you, it's Yahweh. He's the one who called you. He's left a message for you and He says, *"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."*

God has left you a message – "Call me." You're probably not going to use your cell phone to do that, but you want to talk to the Lord and pray. And not only pray here, what does it say? It says pray because He wants to tell you something. So you want to pray and then listen because God has great things He wants to share with you in your life. Every time you see your cell phone this week and you check a message, you say, "I wonder if it's Yahweh calling." I want you to remember that and spend some time praying and ask God, "God, what is the great thing that you want to share with me today?"

That's what God's doing in this passage. He's using an example that they'll remember for the rest of their lives.

So verse 6 says in Numbers 17 – *So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their leaders gave him twelve staffs, one for the leader of each of their ancestral tribes, and Aaron’s staff was among them. Moses placed the staffs before the Lord in the tent of the covenant law. And then they all went home in anticipation. They had to wait.*

I wonder what they were thinking? See, we know the end of the story. Maybe you know the end of the story here. They didn’t know the end of the story. In fact maybe they were going away thinking, “I know what God’s going to do. He’s going to make all of the staffs bud to demonstrate that He has a personal relationship with all of us and that we all have access into His presence.”

Well they waited for a day. They’re waiting in eager anticipation of what is God going to do with all these staffs. Verse 8: *The next day Moses entered the tent and saw that Aaron’s staff, which represented the tribe of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds.*

You know, I have to stop there. We’re going to look at this a little bit more. It just reminds me that only a ministry that’s ordained by God is going to produce fruit. If you want your family, you want your person, you want in your life to be a fruitful person, you want to be in the presence of God and ask God to do that work inside of you. You want to go where God is working and that’s how you’ll have a fruitful life. When God is in control, He’s doing things. It’s not about getting a diploma. You can have a Master’s degree in rods and not have one that blooms or buds or sprouts. It’s about being connected to God and watching Him work in our lives.

Here are some artists’ renditions of the experience that this rod produced. Do you see in the passage it didn’t just sprout like it said there. What does it say it did? It *budded*, then it *blossomed*, and it *produced almonds*. My goodness! That is amazing.

Here is another artist’s rendition of giving the rod back to Aaron, the priest. Notice the other rods in the back there don’t have any sprouts. Giving him back his rod that had budded. Wow. What an illustration. Twenty-four hours that took place.

This is what an almond branch looks like when it’s blossoming. Those are blossoms from an almond branch. You see the little bud at the end of the twig. This is what almonds look like when they come out on the tree. All of this is what they were seeing.

So Moses comes out of the tent, has all of these. He’s handing the rods to all of the guys and he says, “Aaron, this buds for you.” [laughter] Ha ha! I like that.

Verse 9: *Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the Lord’s presence to all the Israelites. They looked at them, and each of the leaders took his own staff.*

Man that must have been interesting. Each one gets their own staff. It’s back just the way I got it. My name’s still on it and nothing’s happened. This isn’t going to be an illustration for them of something very important. Do you see how God used correction last week in Numbers 16 in the

rebellion to teach them a very important lesson about His leadership and about His design. You go to the word. God has designed this. It's very important.

When you think of the Old Testament and you think of how we apply this to our lives, some people will look at the Old Testament and say the congregation, all of us, we're like the twelve tribes of Israel and the pastors are like the priests who represent God before the people. That is a false understanding of the scriptures.

When we understand who we are in Christ, as God is explaining this through Peter, in his epistle it says we are a priesthood, we are all priests. You and I are not just Levites because the Levites couldn't be the priests. They couldn't offer the sacrifices. They just cared for the temple. We're not like the general population. We're not even like the Levites. We are all, you and me, we are priests. We can go into the Holy Place of God and we can speak to Him and enjoy Him and enjoy His presence in a way that's unlike anyone else. So as you look at the Old Testament, don't start thinking these guys are the pastors, think of yourself. You are a priest going into the presence of God with a staff that buds.

Verse 10: *The Lord said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the ark of the covenant law, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die." Moses did just as the Lord commanded him.*

So why do we have this instruction? It's so the people will know how to live. God has designed things to make this work. God's designed His word for us to follow. It's not just about rules to punish us; it's to provide us with the way to live so that we will not die. So that we'll be able to go forward and do what God expects us to do. So Moses obeyed God.

If you look at this passage, you see applications in here. We need to follow the Lord. We need to find out His instructions first before we make our own decisions. We need to realize that the power of God is what we want to follow, that any leadership that we have must be led with a rod. If we're going to lead with a rod it's got to be led by the Spirit of God. Wow. Great illustrations in this passage.

But there's two more verses in this chapter that we want to look at before we're done that are striking to me. I want you to sense the emotion that's in verses 12-13. Now this whole event has taken place and all the Israelites are watching this, all the people, and they're seeing what's happening. This is their response. *The Israelites said to Moses, "We will die! We are lost, we are all lost! Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord will die. Are we all going to die?"*

I mean this is like over the top. Over and over they're saying the same thing. They're obviously afraid. Why are they afraid? Because they just saw the power of God.

I'm convinced that as we see the power of God work in our lives today, we will be afraid. Now not afraid in the sense that we have to run away like these guys, unless you're not doing the right thing. If you're doing the wrong thing, you better start running. Not that you can get away from God, but it's that sense of fear that says, "I'm getting out of here."

But if you're doing the right thing and your conscience is facing toward God and you're obeying Him, then the little nudges when He corrects you, you make changes, and you continue to follow Him. Then the fear turns into this awesome respect for who God is because of the power that He has to take a dead thing and bring it to life. That is the power of God.

That's one of my prayers is that we'll all see that in the next four months. We will see God's power revealed, live things come out of dead things. I don't know what that is, but I hope you're praying. I hope you're praying for a miracle. You might think that some of the things in your life are impossible right now, but you've got to understand that in order to have a miracle you have to start with impossible. Otherwise it's not a miracle. It starts with impossible and then it goes into a miracle. And that's what God wants to do. I'm convinced He wants to reveal Himself in that way to us.

You see, in Tim Kimmel's family, the man I showed you earlier, they prayed. In their situation God chose to answer their prayer with a "yes" and Ian was healed from the lymphoma that he was experiencing.

Tim was eager to share with me this video, so I want to share it with you. This is Ian. Tim does CrossFit. A number of their family does CrossFit and that's how they stay healthy. This is Ian sixth months after this event that I already told you about. Six months. He's training now, he's just working out. This happened the week before Tim shared with me. This happened last week.

[Video]

Now I don't know how much weight that is and some of you don't realize the significance of that except to know that God produced strength out of a man who was very weak.

I'm convinced that God wants to do that in our lives. He wants to provide us with the strength, and He does that by taking dead things and turning them into living things.

Pray with me, would you, that God would do some powerful things in our lives. And I'd like to hear it. If God reveals His power to you, you've got to tell me. I want to know because that's what I'm praying for.

Stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I come before you now and I come on behalf of my brothers and sisters. We all want to see your power and we want to see you work in amazing ways. We all know people who want to know you and need to know you. So we're asking that you would reveal your power in some great ways. Would you do that, Lord? We'll give you the glory. We'll watch it happen. We know that we're nothing. We look at ourselves – who am I, Lord? Why would you choose to use this? But we know that you delight in using people. So we ask you to use us. In Jesus' name, amen.