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May 31, 2015

NUMBERS 7:1-8:4

Numbers Series

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, in our world we're all just like everybody else around our world. In fact I feel like we're treated many times just like a number. The IRS knows me by my number. Amazon knows me by my email address. Often we're not treated in a way that's unique to me, but, Lord, I feel special because of what you've done in my heart. I feel special because you've created me. We can feel special because you've redeemed us. You sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross. You have this overall plan, but the fact that you allow us to be a part of that plan makes us feel special. You've given us a spiritual gift that is unique and special for us, so that provides this sense of being special as well. So in an age where people are talking about self-esteem, we're grateful that we can have Christ-esteem in our hearts and we can have this sense of acceptance and this sense of worthiness because of, not things we've done, not because of our intelligence or our beauty or our education or our money, but it's because of our relationship with you. Lord, give us a great appreciation for who we are because of what you've done and are doing and continue to do in our own hearts and lives. It's because you've done those things and you've created us to be special and you have a place for us in your plan that we look at your word now with great anticipation, knowing that as we look at your word you will speak to us and give us ideas of what's next, what we need to be thinking about, what we need to be doing. So teach us from your word this morning. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Would you please open your Bibles with me to the book of Numbers 7. Now in the book of Numbers 7 we've come to the end of a very important part. Remember in Numbers they've counted everybody to find out how many people we have to fight in the army. We've counted the people who are going to be the Levites to serve. We've gathered all of the things that are needed for the tabernacle.

So if you look at chapter 7:1 it says this: *When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle.* You can imagine the excitement. Here it comes! All of our pieces that we've created. The brass rings, the cords, the curtains made out of animal skins. All of the equipment that would be used in the tabernacle is now being set up and everybody's watching, as many can see what's going on. It's being erected now.

It says, *When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle he anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils.* What a special day that must have been. It's done. It's finished. Let's take some time now and dedicate all of this to the Lord.

I don't know about you, but when I get a car (I don't buy new cars, but for me it's new), I want to dedicate that car to the Lord. When I get a house, I want to dedicate that house to the Lord.

I was just talking to the Smith family this morning. They got a new house. I think they're getting this new house anyway. They've arranged that the Cointots are coming over and they're going to go through every room of the house and the perimeter of the house and pray for it, pray that God will sanctify that house, dedicate it. It's something that they want dedicated to the Lord in that particular way. All we have we want dedicated to the Lord.

I admire the Snees. John and Maria have dedicated their house to the Lord. That's why we get to go over there so much. Because when they dedicated the house to the Lord, they said, "Lord, we want to use this for ministry." So their house is available, so we use it all the time. Great for a church like us that doesn't have a building. We need someplace to meet sometimes, so the Snees have dedicated their home to the Lord. It's useable for Calvary Chapel Living Hope and for others. It's just a real privilege.

All we have are ministry tools. I would just encourage you. Think about what you have. Dedicate it to the Lord that He'd be able to use it in your life and in the lives of other people.

Verse 2: Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of families who were the tribal leaders in charge of those who were counted, made offerings. So you're going to see the same names. If you've been with us all throughout you're going to see that the same names of the tribe mentioned who were responsible for counting all the fighting men are now named as the ones who are going to represent their people to bring an offering to the Lord.

Verse 3: They brought as their gifts before the Lord six covered carts and twelve oxen—an ox from each leader and a cart from every two. These they presented before the tabernacle.

So twelve tribes, twelve oxen – one from each tribe. They only need six carts. So two tribes went in together and they put together a cart. Now this cart is going to be probably some kind of a flat bed trailer with wheels and an axle. I don't know if it has two wheels or four wheels. But it's going to have wheels, it's going to have the axles, it's going to have a hitching park that will hitch to oxen.

So they have six of these all being brought and they're going to be used for the (notice in verse 3) – *These they presented before the tabernacle.* They're going to be used in order to transport the things that are going to have to be taken down and every time they move. God designed this to be a portable tent, a portable tabernacle that would be taken down every time they go to the next place. When they're taken down they're going to need some things to carry them, so He provides six carts, twelve oxen to do that. And they're coming from all of the people that are there. So twelve tribes are doing that.

This is important because remember God has set aside the Levites to do the spiritual care for the people. These sacrifices are going to come. The priests come out of the Levites. All they're going to do is that spiritual care. But everyone is participating in the spiritual part of the community because they're contributing what they're giving.

It's the same thing we do at Calvary Chapel Living Hope or any church. We give our money, not because we're involved in every little project that's going on, but we're contributing to the bigger whole of what's happening. So when something amazing happens, somebody gets saved, I can say, "I'm a part of that," and you can say, "I'm a part of that." Even though we may not have been there when that happened, we're contributing to the ministry that takes place in the spiritual community.

Now God has brought to Calvary Chapel Living Hope an amazing number of people who understand giving and give financially. I'm really grateful for you.

If you look at our history (I probably told you this story before), a couple years ago when we were first starting we lost a number of people, our attendance dropped, and so not only was I not getting paid as a pastor but I had to pay to be a pastor. So the bills would come in, they were greater than what we had money for, so I was paying to be a pastor. It was a good time in my life during those months because I had to ask myself, "Do I really want to be a pastor? Because I'm paying to be one!"

That isn't happening anymore and I'm grateful that God has brought a number of you who understand giving and understand the value of it and you receive the blessings. Because when things are happening in the spiritual community here, you can say, "Yes, I'm a part of it. I'm invested into that." We are collectively giving, as they were here. All these twelve tribes now they're representing their people and they're coming and they're bringing gifts before the Lord to equip the tabernacle.

So far we've talked about these gifts which are the carts and the oxen. Six carts, twelve oxen. Now that's going to be important numbers in just a moment. I want you to see that as we move forward because here's what Moses did with them. Notice verse 4. *The Lord said to Moses, "Accept these from them, that they may be used in the work at the tent of meeting."*

Notice the next statement. I want to park here for a moment. *"Give them to the Levites as each man's work requires."* Don't give them equally to everybody because they're not going to be given equally. Six carts are not going to be given equally to the three different groups of people. The Merarites, the Gershonites, and the Kohathites. Those are the three groups of the Levites that do the work. They're not all going to get the same number of carts.

I think that's going to be really interesting because notice it says, *Give them to the Levites as each man's work requires.* What you're going to see is that everybody gets the number of carts that they need to carry their load. In the same way that God does that for you and me, He gives us the carts we need to carry our load. You have a load that's different than the next person. You get a certain number of carts to carry your load. God equips you with your amount to carry the load that you have. You can't compare and say, "How come he got more carts than I did?"

I think that's not just an Old Testament principle; it's a New Testament principle. So let me share the principle and the application first and then I'm going to share the story with you in the book of Numbers.

Here's a New Testament passage that describes the same thing that God treats us all individually. He says in Romans 12, *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.* See, God distributes the faith but He doesn't distribute it equally. You're going to see that in the next verses. Very interesting as we start imagining ourself and who we are before God and in life.

Verse 4: *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

I find it fascinating that God has given each of us what we need in order to carry our load. Some of us have different loads and those loads are challenging. Some of us have different emotional challenges. God has given you the carts to carry the load. Some of us have different financial challenges. God has given you the finances. I don't mean given you the money, but He often gives you what you need to carry the load. God gives you what you need in order to carry the load that you have. God gives you the carts to be able to do that.

Here's another verse from the New Testament that the song that we sang contained this verse and there was a pause in there. I felt like saying, "Watch that verse!" but I didn't during the worship time. This is that same verse that was in that song, but I want to draw attention to it again because it describes how each one of us has what we need. God designs it that way. He protects us so that we have what we need to deal with the struggles each one of us personally face.

It says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out.* I often think, "Wow, I'm glad he put that there so I can get out of here." But it's not get out of here. *A way out so that you can endure it.* The word there is 'bear up under it.'

You have pressures. You have unique challenges. They're different than mine. But God has given you the ability to endure that so you don't have to succumb to the temptations that exist around you.

That's a very fascinating concept. So now when we see how the carts are divided up we'll understand why some people get two carts and some people get four carts and some people get zero carts. Very interesting as we move forward.

I started thinking about this idea about how God has given me or all of us each the carts that we need to manage our load. I'm thinking, wait a minute, there's something missing in the theology of that because of this verse, Galatians 6:2. It says, *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way*

you will fulfill the law of Christ. So I realized that, yes, God has given me all the carts, but some of those carts are other people that help me carry the load.

When I say to myself, “God has given me the carts that I need to carry the load,” I don’t want to imagine that I’m an island, that somehow I’m independent and therefore don’t need other people. I do need other people and God has designed His church to be that kind of a place where we bear one another’s burdens. We’re not independent people. So let’s not misunderstand what the carts mean here in that we’re all independent. There’s this sense in which we’re gaining benefit from each other and that’s why we build the friendships, that’s why we go to the women’s Bible study, the men’s Bible study, or we’re connected with other people. Because we want to experience God’s grace and He often gives it to us through other people.

Now let’s go back to the book of Numbers 7 and continue on in verse 6 and see how Moses divided up the carts. *So Moses took the carts and oxen and gave them to the Levites. He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required, and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, as their work required. They were all under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest. But Moses did not give any to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible.*

Let me remind you that the Merarites and the Gershonites took care of the curtains and the poles and the cords and the brass rings. They took care of all of those things.

But the Kohathites, their job was to take care of the altar and all of the furnishings. The forks that would go into get the meat out of the flames. They would take the shovels that would move the incense around. They were the ones who had the table of showbread and the candelabra on top. They took care of all those things including the ark of the covenant. God had special instructions for those things – “Don’t put them on a cart.” Don’t put those things on a cart; rather you carry them on your shoulders, on trays, on poles. So they would have two men carrying the altar or carrying the miscellaneous tools that would be used. The ark of the covenant itself would be carried on poles as people would walk forward. So the Kohathites did not get any carts.

It’s interesting they didn’t complain and say, “Hey, that’s not fair. He got more carts than I did.” I think we need to ask ourselves an important question because sometimes in our lives when the load starts to get difficult we start saying, “It’s not fair. My load’s too big. I don’t have as many carts as he has.” But you’ve got to realize God only gives you the carts that the work requires. That’s really a blessing. Because if you have carts that you don’t need, you’ve got extra wagon wheels to deal with and extra axles that you have to fix, and extra oxen droppings that you’ve got to work around. So God has given you only the oxen and the carts that you need to deal with your load.

I just find that really fascinating and I enjoyed pondering that this week as the Lord was working on my own heart in regards to His word here. Rejoice in what you have and don’t be overwhelmed by the problems that you have. God has given you the carts to deal with that and some of those may be the people within this fellowship who will help bear your burdens.

Verse 10. Let's go on in the passage. *When the altar was anointed, the leaders brought their offerings for its dedication and presented them before the altar. For the Lord had said to Moses, "Each day one leader is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar."*

Now we're going to have a twelve day ceremony for the dedication of the altar and all the things around. In those twelve days one leader for that tribe is going to bring a package. The package for that tribal leader is going to be exactly the same package for the next tribal leader. They were to make some things and bring them and they were to have some animals and bring them. I want to show you what those are.

This is the second longest chapter in the Bible. We're going to get through it and part of the next chapter and then we're going to be done for today. But I want you to see that each of the packages are identical. So I'm going to read it once and I'm not going to read it the other eleven times.

Look at verse 10. *When the altar was anointed, the leaders brought their offerings for its dedication and presented them before the altar. For the Lord had said to Moses, "Each day one leader is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar."*

Verse 12: *The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah.* So tribe of Judah is represented number one. We're going to go through twelve tribes here. Each one's going to bring the exact same package.

This is what's in the package (verse 13): *His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels.* Now to make a silver plate you know where they got the silver, right? It came from Egypt when the Egyptians said, "Get out of here and we'll give you all kinds of stuff if you'll just leave us alone." So they took all of those silver and gold precious stones, as well as all of the other things, out with them and now they take the silver and they form it into a plate. Someone within that tribal group is making a plate. I don't know if the plate is inscribed with Judah on it, or is decorative as some of the other things are, or if it's just a plate they formed out of silver, but that's what they're bringing to the Lord here.

His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels (so now we have a plate and a bowl), both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with the finest flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. So they take really fine flour, they mix it with olive oil, which makes a dough, and that's what's in the plate and the bowl as they're bringing it to the dedication here.

Verse 14: *one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense.* So somebody made this gold dish out of the gold that came out of Egypt *weighing ten shekels, filled with incense.*

Now we have some animals, several of them representing sacrifices that would be offered. Some of the sacrifices are burnt offerings, which will be totally consumed before the Lord in worship. Others of them are fellowship offerings which the priest would be able to take part of that and this would sustain the priest in their eating and all of the Levites would be able to participate in

that food. Some of the sacrifices are ones that the actual burnt offering would receive. I don't think we have those here in this particular passage, but that's how the sacrifices are designed.

So here's the different animals – *one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering; one male goat for a sin offering; and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab.* Exact words they were offering this.

The largest chapter in the Bible (if you were wondering) is the one in Psalm 119 that's talking about the importance of the Bible. One hundred eighty verses and every verse talks about how valuable God's word is. Really fun passage to read. You might not read it all (180 verses is a lot to consume in one setting), but if you learn more about how valuable the Bible is it just makes you want to go and study the Bible. Largest chapter in the Bibles about the importance of God's word.

Second largest chapter in the Bible talking about giving. I don't think that's an accident it talks of the importance and the value of our giving and our sacrifice before the Lord. Because our giving not only does something for the spiritual service of the community, but it also does something for us because now we are owning it. We're investing in it. We're part of this particular spiritual community.

Now they're going to list the exact same package twelve times in this passage. That's impressive because it's not like a photocopy machine where you can just photocopy it. They're writing it on parchments, leather pieces that are in scrolls. So they're using up valuable material to do this. And they're going to do it twelve times. I'm not going to read it every time.

Here's the point I think that it's making: every gift is important. Every time you decide to give to the Lord's work, that gift is important to God. It makes a statement. The leaders are bringing those gifts. Leaders give to the Lord. The person who's spiritual is the one who finds the offering plate. That's what we say.

We don't have to at Calvary Chapel. We don't do a lot of talking about money. Rarely do you ever hear me say anything about finances from the pulpit. We don't have to do that because of the people in our fellowship. We focus on growth and spiritual development. When people are spiritual that's a natural outflow of their spirituality. Every tribal leader now is going to bring a gift and we want to be givers in our lives.

I think one of the reasons God is doing this is because of the verse in the New Testament that says this: *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* So when you give to the Lord's work then your treasure is in that. You have your heart there. You're wondering, "I wonder what's going on with my church because I'm committed there and I'm investing in that. I'm curious to watch those videos he sends. I'm curious to read those emails that come. I'm curious to know what's going on in the women's Bible study or the men's Bible study because I'm a part of that."

God has designed the spiritual community to be that way. You can't take it with you; you may as well send it ahead. And that's what these guys are doing here as they're committing to the Lord.

We're going to go through the twelve tribes. Look at verse 18. It says, *On the second day Nethanel son of Zuar, the leader of Issachar, brought his offering.* And then it goes and says the exact same words, exact same gift (which I'm not going to read).

But go down to verse 24. *On the third day, Eliab son of Helon, the leader of the people of Zebulun, brought his offering.* Same package comes before the Lord.

Verse 30: *On the fourth day Elizur son of Shedeur, the leader of the people of Reuben, brought his offering.*

Verse 36: *On the fifth day Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, the leader of the people of Simeon, brought his offering.*

Verse 42: *On the sixth day Eliasaph son of Deuel, the leader of the people of Gad, brought his offering.*

Verse 48: *On the seventh day Elishama son of Ammihud, the leader of the people of Ephraim, brought his offering.*

Verse 54: *On the eighth day Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, the leader of the people of Manasseh, brought his offering.*

Verse 60: *On the ninth day Abidan son of Gideoni, the leader of the people of Benjamin, brought his offering.*

Verse 66: *On the tenth day Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai, the leader of the people of Dan, brought his offering.*

Verse 72: *On the eleventh day Pagiel son of Okran, the leader of the people of Asher, brought his offering.*

Verse 78: *On the twelfth day Ahira son of Enan, the leader of the people of Naphtali, brought his offering.*

Verse 84 – Now we have the summary and it's the exact same thing, but it says twelve instead of one. *These were the offerings of the Israelite leaders for the dedication of the altar when it was anointed: twelve silver plates* and so on. So it goes right through all those things and it talks about all of them and multiplies all the numbers by twelve.

The end of verse 88 says, *These were the offerings for the dedication of the altar after it was anointed.*

People would read this later, I'm sure, and they would say, "That was my grandfather who was part of that tribe and they contributed to what was happening." Now the things that are happening in the spiritual community are not just part of what's happening there; it's something everybody's participating in. It's an amazing thing.

Go to verse 89 because this is really going to help us connect and understand some more things about prayer and connecting to the Lord. Verse 89: *When Moses entered the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant law. In this way the Lord spoke to him.*

It's interesting that Moses went in with the intent of speaking to the Lord, but heard the Lord speak. I want to encourage you to do this in your prayer life. That when you come before the Lord to pray you also take time to listen. Sometimes we go in and we pray and we have our list and we say, "Okay, God. That's it. I'm done." But sometimes if we come and we lay our prayer list before the Lord then we say, "God, here are my requests," and we start to listen, sometimes God says something in regards to those requests or something completely different to us. So listening is important. He went in with the intent of speaking, but the speaking was a two-way thing. He's also listening to God speak.

He goes into the tent of meeting. Now the tent of meeting is the name for the tabernacle, which is a large tent area that blocks off everything with an entrance. Then there's the tabernacle proper, the internal part, which is an enclosed building made out of these animal skins. You go into the first part or the first room called the holy place. In the holy place you have a table with a lampstand on it (a menorah, as we would call it today), and it has candles (not candles, but oil) that's lighting the menorah on one side. Then you have the table of showbread and the table of incense. Those are the three pieces of furniture that exist in the holy place.

Then there's the curtain that separates it from the most holy place where the ark of the covenant is with the cherubim on top and only the high priest once a year could go in there. That's where Moses is talking to the Lord, somewhere in the midst of all of this. That's what's happening. He's having this communication with God.

The ark is in the center, the ark itself, this thing they would carry on their shoulders is in the center of the tabernacle proper, which is in the center of the tabernacle itself which is, remember, posted in the center of the people. When they camped it was in the center and when they marched there were tribes in front and tribes in back. It was in the center.

When God is in the center of our lives it balances everything out in our hearts. Sometimes we view God as an elective. He's over here and we call and we go to Him when we want. I would suggest that we want to have Him in the center and when He's in the center He speaks to us. Then we can hear Him speak, we can listen, we can go to Him, and when we listen to Him then we can know what we're going to do, where we're going to go. Next week when we look up at the cloud and how it goes, we're going to talk about following the Lord and what that looks like. But Moses went in to speak to the Lord and he listened. We need to have that kind of intimacy with God as we go forward.

I just want to take the first four verses of chapter 8 before we close today because I want to talk to you a little bit more about his tabernacle. When they went into the holy place (not the most holy) it was dark in there. There was no natural light. And that's why they had to have the lampstand there that's talked about in chapter 8, verse 1. *The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you set up the lamps, see that all seven light up the area in front of the lampstand.'"* So position them well so they're lighting everything up and you can see what's going on because there's no exterior light.

When you go into this special place the curtains are shut and it's pitch black in there. All you see is the light that represents there. It's a place where there's no natural light, but the light represented shows on the bread that's over there, the twelve loaves of bread. It shows on the incense over there and it lights up that room a little bit. I think that's really significant.

I would suggest that in your prayer time you go into a place where you block out the rest of the world sometimes and all you have inside of that place is the light of Jesus Christ, the light of the world who comes in and illumines us and points out our hearts and points out the things we need to work on inside of our lives. It's just a beautiful picture and he says, "I want you to dedicate that area."

Verse 3 says, Aaron did so; he set up the lamps so that they faced forward on the lampstand, just as the Lord commanded Moses. This is how the lampstand was made: It was made of hammered gold—from its base to its blossoms. The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern the Lord had shown Moses.

When we go into that special place of prayer and we listen to God speak, if we can block out the rest of the world it's just like pitch black except for seeing the light of Jesus Christ. That light of the world comes into the darkness and often the darkness of our hearts, and He points out things in our lives that are so powerful. We walk out of there changed people. We walk out of there, "Yes! I've met with the Lord!"

I just want to encourage you in your spiritual life that you do that. Because here's what happens: You go in there and the light reveals something in your heart, your heart is just open before the Lord, the Lord ministers to your heart and worship takes place. We come out of there and we're able to worship the Lord continually in life. Not just on Sunday morning, but worship becomes who we are.

God is designing this whole process for these people so they can understand more about God, how they should live, and the power of worship in their lives. It's just strategic. I'm convinced that as we do that in our own hearts and we see the light it lights up our hearts and then we really understand what worship is all about.

Would you stand with me. I'm going to pray in just a minute. If the Lord is speaking to your heart and you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior we have prayer counselors on the side that will pray for you. If you've got some issue you're dealing with in your life, you want to dedicate something to the Lord in your heart, just go over and pray with them and they

will pray with you this morning. We need the prayer of other believers around us as we dedicate our hearts to the Lord regularly.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now as needy people, recognizing our own humility, our own sin, our own need to come before you and ask for your grace to work in our hearts in new ways every day. We need the light from those lampstands, we need the light from your presence in our own hearts. So Lord, lighten our hearts, remove the darkness. Teach us what it means to worship you in the deepest place of our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.