

## "Be Prepared to Serve God in Life's Routines"

### *Numbers 3-4*

The most repeated phrase we've heard and read the last couple of weeks is 'back to school'. But alongside that phrase most people are looking forward or for some dreading possibly another popular phrase 'back to routines'. We live by routines. We just finished the summer routines. Perhaps for some of you it was more leisurely or more unstructured and you enjoyed that. But September often brings us back to different routines with a return to work, school, home and different church routines.

The problem with routines is if we're not careful they become mindlessly comfortable and possibly godless. Do you fall into godless routines? What I mean is do you go to work or school or go through your daily routines and just do it without thinking about God or seeing God in it? Do you separate that part of your life from God as if He's not interested or you don't think he's involved? He is very interested in what we do every day and He actually wants to be the focus in our routines. "*Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God*" (1 Cor. 10:31). What's more routine than eating or drinking?? How can we be prepared as this week to serve God in the routines of life? Let's take a look at a Numbers 3-4 and learn how we can serve and glorify God in our routines in life.

The Book of Numbers is appropriately named for the two main censuses of the Israelites in the book. The first in Ch.'s 1-3 of the original generation that came out of the exodus from Egypt. And then in Ch. 26, almost 40 years later the next generation who will enter the Promised Land are counted. For this morning I am interested in the counting of the Levites in Ch.'s 3-4. If you want to learn how to serve and glorify God in the routine of life you study the Levites who performed the same duties everyday at the Tabernacle and later the Temple. In Ex. 25-40 Moses received the instructions from God on how to build the Tabernacle. In Leviticus we learn what kind of sacrifices are brought to the Tabernacle and why. As well as what laws and holy days to observe. In Numbers 3-4 God tells Moses who He's going to pick to serve in The Tabernacle; He's going to pick from the tribe of Levi. Moses and Aaron are descendants of Levi. God is choosing Aaron to be Israel's first priest (and high priest) and only direct descendants of Aaron serve as priests. The assistants to the priests were chosen from the tribe of Levi. So all priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests. They were priests' assistants. The main difference was the priests could go into the holy place but the Levites could not.

Levi, one of the 12 sons of Jacob had 3 sons, Gershom, Kohath and Merari. So in Num. 3-4 we have the counting of the males from their lines and the assigning of the roles of each of the 3 sons families. It's very clear that God chose the family of Levi to be the ones to serve Him at the Tabernacle. I think there's a parallel here that we can draw on as we seek how to serve and glorify God in the routines He puts us in. We need to be prepared to serve God . . .

### **With the 'Family' God Places us In** **(3:1-10)**

When it comes to whose family we are born into, we have no say. We don't know if Gershom, Kohath and Merari got along well! They had no choice in who they got to serve with. That's true in life too. We have different families in our life. We have the family we live with. We have our 'work' family;

people we work with day to day that we develop relationships with. Some we get along great with and work well with, others . . . not so much. We have recreational 'families'. A team, a club, a group. We join a group or team and we don't always click but for the sake of the group or team we work together. And of course we have our 'church' families. We become part of a diversified group of people, all at various stages in our Christian walk, all with unique spiritual gifts and talents and all with different personalities. But we work together to serve and glorify God with. So we learn here that we serve and glorify God in 'family' units to do what?

### **To serve others (vv.1-6)**

Aaron was the chief priest. His sons were the other priests. They performed the sacrifices and kept the Menorah lit and burned incense and looked after the showbread in the Holy Place. The Levites served under them. In Num. 3:5 we read,

*<sup>5</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>6</sup> "Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him.*

The word for assist (or serve) is the Hebrew word *sharat*. They are two Hebrew words for serve; *sharat* and *eved*. *Eved* was used for any servant but *sharat* was used for a higher servant, one who assisted someone significant. To serve God in this capacity was a higher calling, a privileged service. To assist Aaron and his sons was a privilege. So God says to be a Levite was a privilege. To serve Aaron was a privilege. Not everyone gets to do this.

Perhaps we should re-evaluate our jobs, our families, and the other groups of people God has placed us in with our unique, gifts, talents and personality and realize not everyone gets to do this. Not everyone gets to work with these people, or in this job or for this purpose. We need to be thankful for those whom God has given us to live with, work with, play with and serve God with. That was Jesus' attitude regarding the 12 God gave Him. The night before He died He prayed in John 17:6,

*<sup>6</sup> "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. . . . <sup>9</sup> I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. . . . protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*

Jesus acknowledged God's sovereignty in the group He gave Him to work with. And Jesus did what God asked; He revealed God to them and now prayed for them to remain strong and grow as one with Him and each other. And Jesus served them as well as served with them.

God puts us in places where we serve under people. We need to serve them as Jesus would serve them. But to be prepared to do that we have to have think like Jesus in all areas of life. Work, family, recreation and church.

The main task the Levites had in serving at the Tabernacle is really the main task we have in serving God in all of life. Their specific task at the Tabernacle was . . .

### **To help people draw near to God (v.7)**

*<sup>7</sup> They are to perform duties for him [Aaron] and for the **whole community** at the tent of meeting by doing the work of the tabernacle.*

Their work at the Tabernacle was to assist the priests in offering the sacrifices of the people for their sins so people can be forgiven and draw near to God. That's their duties for the whole community. They played a mediatorial and intercessory role in helping people get closer to God. Isn't that our role in all of life whether its work, family, recreation or church is to use our spiritual gifts, abilities and resources to either help people find a relationship with God through Jesus Christ or helping one another draw closer in our relationship with God? This was God's initial desire for all of Israel. When God first brought them out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai He said in Ex. 19:4

*<sup>4</sup> 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."*

But Israel disobeyed God. So God set apart this one family unit to be the go-betweens for the rest. But in the Tabernacle process of coming before God only by shedding of blood and only through a Mediator, God paved the way for His Son Jesus to come and be the One Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:6) through whose shed blood we now have access and the privilege to draw near to God. The priesthood under the Law was limited to your blood relationship to Levi. But the priesthood today includes anyone who is related to Jesus by His blood, who has asked for forgiveness of sins and believe by faith alone He saves us, not by our works.

And so now – as God always desired – all His people are 'priests' whose primary purpose in life is to help others draw near to God. Look at 1 Peter 2:4,

*<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— <sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

The Tabernacle and Temple are done away with because Jesus fulfilled them but there are many who haven't trusted in Him yet and all of us still need to grow in Him. So we are to offer spiritual sacrifices to God each day to help others draw near to God. Look at v.9

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

One spiritual sacrifice is to declare you believe in God who alone called you out of darkness and into His light. It's a sacrifice because we have to give up our pride, our fears, our self-centered pursuits and our time to help people who are in darkness and need God's mercy to understand Jesus died for their sins and they need to repent and draw near to God through Him.

And we do this in the routines of our life; the things we do most of the time. How we work, how we enjoy life, how we raise our kids; all are part of life's routines that become windows through which people see God through us.

And we are to do it . . .

### ***With care (vv.8-10)***

Back in Num. 3:8-10

<sup>8</sup> They are to take care of all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle. <sup>9</sup> Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to him. <sup>10</sup> Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary is to be put to death.”

Some of our translations say ‘guard’ or ‘keep’. It means to exercise great care over so that people understand how to approach God properly. Because to presume anyone has a right to enter God’s presence results in death. How many people do you know presume they have a connection with God based on their own character and not by the shed blood of Jesus? Too many. What will result? Death, which means separation from God. We who know Jesus and have already understood how to approach God need to help people with great care to understand you can’t presume on your good works or your religious upbringing that you are entitled to access God. The Jews were chosen by God to be His people if they chose that for themselves. It wasn’t automatic with them; therefore it’s not automatic with anyone. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Him. The Tabernacle system pictured this careful, one-way approach to God. And those who know how it is done need to take care to help others approach God only through the way He says.

The Levites weren’t any more special than the other 11 tribes. The rest of ch.3 shows that we’re prepared to serve and glorify God when we . . .

### **Acknowledge the Grace God Extends to Us** **(3:11-51)**

God reminded the Levites and all those who serve God

#### ***Serve as Redeemed People of God (vv.11-20, 39-51)***

God reminds the Israelites that the Levites serve God at a great cost; the death of the firstborn in Egypt.

<sup>11</sup> The LORD also said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> “I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine, <sup>13</sup> for all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether human or animal. They are to be mine. I am the LORD.”

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He did it through the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, the angel of death killing all firstborn in Egypt and Israel if they didn’t cover their doorframe with the blood of the Lamb. Israel owed God so God originally said every firstborn male belongs to God for service. However, God changed this by choosing the Levites to be ‘the firstborn’ on behalf of all Israel. So the other 11 tribes would not lose their first born sons to Tabernacle service.

So God ordered a census of all male Levites and the firstborn males of all the other tribes. In vv.39-51 we read that the number of 1<sup>st</sup> born outnumbered the Levite males by 273. So in order to make it even there was paid 5 shekels each to the priests for the 273 more firstborn Israelites than there were Levites. The price of redemption had to be paid so that people could approach God.

But the counting of the Levites and their being chosen in place of the firstborn reminds all of us,

#### ***We serve by representing people to God (vv.21-38)***

That's what priests did; they represented the people to God. Jesus of course is our Great High Priest who is our Mediator between God and us. Only through Him do we have access. But we too are priests offering spiritual sacrifices to God. When we pray for each other we are representing one another to God based on our being redeemed by the blood of Jesus. We're all spiritual priests able to come boldly into the throne of grace to find grace and mercy for each other in our time of need (Heb. 4:16).

The Levites were chosen by grace to serve God and represent others to God. We are saved by grace. We are called, predestined, justified and will be glorified one day. Our spiritual gifts and talents and resources and relationships and jobs and children are all grace, grace, grace, grace. This is crucial to helping us serve God in the routines of life. Because if we accept how God places us in 'families' (home, work, play, and neighborhood) and realize salvation and service are all undeserved and given to us by the grace of God we will . . .

## **Be Content with God's Assignment for Us** **(Ch. 4, 16)**

In Ch. 4 God tells Moses and Aaron to count the Levites by the families of the 3 sons Kohath, Gershom and Merari. In vv.1-20 God tells Aaron that when the Israelites have to move and set up the Tabernacle elsewhere there are specific ways in which things are to be done. Since only the priests can go in the holy place only the priests can handle the ark, the menorah, the table of showbread and its utensils and the altar of incense. They had special blue and scarlet cloths that covered each item. They were to treat them all as holy. The Kohathites who would get the responsibility to carry the furniture could not look at it and carry it covered by poles extended through rings on the sides. All this to help them,

### ***Appreciate the holiness of their work (vv.1-20)***

The word holy means 'set apart'. But it's not just church stuff that's holy. Even in the Old testament in Lev. 19:2 God said for His people to be holy because I the Lord Your God am holy." The apostle Peter repeats this command for us in 1 Pet. 1:15

*"But just as He who called you is holy so be holy in all you do; for it is written be holy because I am holy."*

Be holy in all you do; be holy in all our routines. God is holy and by his grace He has set us apart for His service to declare Him to those in darkness in the routines of our jobs, raising our kids, running errands, doing housework, dealing with people all with an attitude of holiness. In other words God set you apart for that. How do you do your work in holiness? As if God were doing it Himself. In honesty, with obedience, with excellence so that people might see God through us. If we're not showing God in our routines in life we're just not getting what following Jesus means. Pray before and during those routine things we do each day and watch how God will help you set it apart for Him.

So the Kohathites got to carry the Holy Place furniture. What about Gershom's family? They were assigned to carry all the curtains. The holy place was set apart with curtains and a covering on top. The outer court where the sacrifices were done was also covered with curtains. The Gershomites were responsible to listen to Aaron and his sons in handling all that.

And what about the Merarites? They carried the posts, the bases, the ropes and the tent pegs which formed the structure, where worship could happen. And then when they put it back up the

Merarites would go first, setting the bases, making sure the posts were secure so the Gershomites could hang the curtains and coverings and then when that was in place the Kohathites would bring in the furniture and the priests would set it up. And when they moved they'd do it all over again, exactly the same thing in the same order by the same people. Very routine. The order in which it was carried out helped each one . . .

### ***Recognize the necessity of the work (vv21-33)***

Every one's work was necessary for worship to happen properly. Yes, it may have been more exciting to carry the ark than it was tent pegs or curtains, but without the tent pegs nothing would stay together. Your role at work may not seem exciting some days but it is necessary. It may be very routine but without it things would not go well.

In the last part of Ch. 4 Moses and Aaron and the leaders count all the Kohathites, Gershomites and Merarites. Why?

Because each one was important. Do you want to enjoy the routine of work, family, recreation and neighborhood more?

### ***Be thankful for each worker (and helper and family) (vv.34-49)***

Thank God for His grace in your life and be content with your routines in the sense that you know it's what God has for you right now. Your work, your family, your team or club and your neighborhood are all part of the routines God has placed you in and called you to serve Him and glorify Him. If you are not content ask God to show you if it's your attitude or maybe He has something different for you? Ask Him to show you how He wants you to use His gifts in you, your talents, time and resources with the 'families' He has yet to show you. Routines change; we move; we change jobs; kids grow up, eventually we retire; but we're just moving from routines to routines. This is how we live and this is where God has placed us to serve Him and glorify Him.

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