"We All Need You"

Numbers 32

When God makes promises to His people, we should know that the enemy will do everything he can to thwart God's work. Way back when Satan first slithered his way into our world, the first words he spoke as recorded in Scripture from Genesis 3 to Eve was this:

Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Since God promised Israel they would get into the land of Canaan and it would be their own land, they have had all kinds of problems getting there. There were many times Israel complained about God's promise to be with them and they complained when they needed water or food. When the 12 spies were sent out to check out the land, and they all said it was a good land, 10 of the spies gave an "evil report", lying about the threats of giants that made them all look like ants. By scaring the majority, they doubted God's ability to get them in. So, God said all you men who listened to the evil report 20+ won't go in. But your kids will.

We've seen challenges to Moses' authority from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and from his own sister and brother. We read about the Edomites and the Aradites refusing Israel safe passage by their lands. We thought God thwarted Balaam's plans to curse Israel – which He did – but then Balaam concocts a plan that involved Midianite women luring men into their false god worship. Lurking behind the scenes of all these events is the enemy, twisting and conniving to do anything he can to thwart God's promises and plans. And now we see another one, completely different and one we never attribute to the work of the enemy but to our own complacency. Our unwillingness to serve God with the community He has placed us in.

Here in Numbers 32 the Israelites have defeated the Midianites and have control over a lot of land east of the Jordan. God promised them that they would get the east of the Jordan but 2 ½ tribes are quite content to settle on this side of the Jordan because we read that *"the land was suitable for livestock".*

While they probably had some livestock all along, with these recent victories they had accumulated more from plunder after the battle. They have been through a lot of desert, and the land east of the Jordan was more fertile. 'Hey Moses, we like it over here.

If we have found favor in your eyes," they said, "let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan."

Moses' angry response reveals the threat against God's promise: everyone was needed to get them victory in the land. And the application is evident for us as God's people today. All of us are needed for God to do the work He wants to do here. God does not have a plan B: we are it.

<u>God Chooses to Work Through His Community</u> (32:1-15)

Moses recognizes that the unwillingness of a few jeopardizes or at least limits, God's community's ability to do the work God calls them to do. Whether it was Israel in 1400 BC or us in 2026 AD. God saves us through faith in Jesus and calls us to gather as local communities of

believers to reach our area for Christ together. Moses is understandably angry. We've come this far. It's taken us almost 40 years to get here when it should have only taken us a year.

Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here?

To paraphrase it and bring it closer to home: *'Shall we worship here; study God's Word here; enjoy fellowship here; serve the community over here … while you sit over there?'*

How often have we all said we'd rather stay home and not get involved in something going on with the church family? Do we ever confess the sin of omission? This is what Moses was confronting here. So we also need to

Beware the temptation of isolation which discourages the community from accomplishing God's purpose (vv.1-9)

A familiar verse to most of us points out our flawed thinking about why we come together. Many people go to church looking to get something. We want to hear God-glorifying worship, we want to hear faithful teaching true to Scripture, we want to have something for our children and we want strong Christian fellowship. But do ever think we are to contribute to that by sacrificing our time and using our spiritual gifts towards the things we come for?

Heb. 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We can't spur each other on if we're not connecting. 'Giving up' doesn't mean giving up on coming, it means giving up on people. The word means abandon. When I don't show up I abandon those that do and whatever gifts God has given me are now unavailable for you. We are all tempted to-wards isolation at times, to just stay away. When we do that we all lose. I lose out on what you have to encourage me with and you lose out on what I have to encourage you with. Think about this next time you are toying with whether to show up for God's people or not.

I'm getting this right from v.7 because Moses says to the 2 ½ tribes who he thinks are abandoning the rest:

7 Why do you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the Lord has given them? 8 This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to look over the land. 9 After they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and viewed the land, they discouraged the Israelites from entering the land the Lord had given them.

It's great to have a full team show up for a game. It's great to have a bunch of people show up for a task but when the numbers are low, we feel discouraged. And those have to pull more weight. And when that happens too often, the workers quit because of exhaustion and frustration.

Moses warns the new generation, don't repeat the same mistake your (now deceased) fathers did when they refused to go into the land of Canaan, 38 years ago. Remember Kadesh? Moses is warning them of another temptation

Beware the temptation of half-hearted obedience ***(vv.10-15)***

11 'Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of the men twenty years old or more who came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob— 12 not one except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they followed the Lord wholeheartedly.' 13 The Lord's

anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone. [14] *"And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the Lord even more angry with Israel.* [15] *If you turn away from following him, he will again leave all this people in the desert, and you will be the cause of their destruction."*

Moses is questioning their loyalty to God and the rest of the community. He assumes (thankfully he was wrong) that they are repeating the sins of their fathers who chose not to believe God could get them in the land the first time.

We all need to be careful we don't pick and choose what we want to obey. Jesus commanded us to be baptized, yet how many of you haven't obeyed Him yet or even refuse? We are commanded to forgive those who hurt us, yet how many of you refuse to let go of bitterness? We're even commanded to meditate on God's words and not turn from it to the left or right. When we obey God from our hearts it will show up in practice. We say we believe God and His Word yet we don't obey it. James 1:22 says we deceive ourselves when we do that, but we don't deceive God.

Moses sees the potential danger from the 2 ½ tribes who want to stay east of the Jordan instead of going into Canaan. Whether they hadn't laid out their plans fully or they were convicted by Moses' warnings, we are pleased to learn they were not going to abandon their fellow brothers and sisters. They boldly proclaim to Moses

God's Work Needs to Come Before Our Wants (32:16-32)

Moses was greatly encouraged to hear their response:

We would like to build pens here for our livestock and cities for our women and children. [17] *But we are ready to arm ourselves and go ahead of the Israelites until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our women and children will live in fortified cities, for protection from the inhabitants of the land.* [18] *We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance.* [19] *We will not receive any inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan, because our inheritance has come to us on the east side of the Jordan."*

They are willing to go in with the others but they do have the responsibility to

Meet the needs of their families (v.16, 24)

They are going to make sure their families are safe and their livestock are secure before they help the rest of Israel gain their inheritance. And Moses agreed in v.24, *"*[24] *Build cities for your women and children, and pens for your flocks, but do what you have promised."*

Because if you are lying to me, Moses states, you are lying to God, and your sin will be exposed. That's a good reminder for us, too: we often make excuses to each other for why we don't come or do what we know we should do, but God is not fooled, of course. There's a verse in the New Testament that we don't give enough thought too.

[2 Cor. 5:7] *We live by faith, not by sight.* [8] *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* [9] *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.* [10] *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

While there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, we will all have a job review on how we served the Lord. There are eternal rewards that we may or may not receive based on how we obeyed – and they are not as clearly outlined as we'd like – but the bottom line is, we will be held accountable for how we walked with Jesus in this life. Yes, of course we are responsible to meet our families' needs but sometimes we put our family's wants before God's needs. And we know when we do it. But here Moses is in agreement; yes, secure your family and your possessions and we will wait for you to join us. Because we are also responsible

For the needs of the community (vv.17-31)

Not only do these 2 ½ tribes agree to help the rest of the community receive God's promises for them, but they also say we will lead the way.

17 But we are ready to arm ourselves and go ahead of the Israelites until we have brought them to their place. 18 We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance. 19 We will not receive any inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan, because our inheritance has come to us on the east side of the Jordan."

And they did as they promised. We read in Joshua 22

***v.1** Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh 2 & said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. 3 For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. 4 Now that the Lord your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. 5 But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him & to serve him with all your heart and all your soul"*

Moses repeats their words in oath language, that they will be blessed for their obedience and be prepared for consequences of disobedience. And the phrase "before the Lord" is invoked numerous times as a reminder to us too that

Everything we do is 'before the Lord' (vv.20-22, 27, 29, 32)

God is everywhere. God is all-knowing. God is always with us. Which is wonderful but also fearful. Moses is reminding these tribes that nothing you promise to do will escape God's notice. Just so you know.

And that works both ways when we disobey but also when we obey Him and no one sees it. Paul encourages the believers in Galatia,

Gal. 6:8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Moses then takes this to Eleazar, who is the High Priest, Joshua – who will take Moses' place – and the leaders of the other tribes so everyone is on the same page. Then Moses gave them the land east of the Jordan and we're given many names of towns we're unaware of [show map]. But these last verses remind all God's people,

All That We Accomplish is God's Gift to Us (32:33-42)

Whether we realize it or not, whatever successes and accomplishments in this life; whether in the business world, community or just in your own home, are God's gifts to us. God made us who we are which means He gave us our talents, brains and personalities to impact people for Him or to succeed. ***And we must do our part in faith (vv.33-42)***

The 2 ½ tribes after receiving God's blessing through Moses that they can have this land as their inheritance, go in faith and conquer the land by subduing those who are there. We see words like 'They built", "drove out" and "settled", but they did these things because they knew God was behind them and with them. They did it by faith believing that God had given it to them.

Just as God did not just hand over all the land to Israel and they had to do their part in faith, so all we do should be done believing by faith that God will produce His fruit through us. If God says He's going to save more people through His word then we can take His word and use it in faith knowing He will accomplish His purposes through us. If Paul says our spiritual gifts are for the common good of the body of Christ, (1 Cor. 12:7), then when we serve one another we can do so by faith believing that God will use us to build each other up. Whether we see evidence of that or not shouldn't matter because that's what faith is all about. As Heb. 11:1 says,

is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

If we know the hope that we will all be conformed to the likeness of Christ, and if we also know God will use us to help each other get there, then we can do so by faith believing that what we know to be true about ourselves will happen.

And one way we show we are serving God by faith is that when we see God work through us, we don't pat ourselves on the back, but rather

We glorify God for what He did through us (vv.38, 41-42)

Did you catch that when they conquered some of these towns they changed the name of the town?

Nebo and Baal Meon (these names were changed) and Sibmah. [41] Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, captured their settlements and called them Havvoth Jair. [42] And Nobah captured Kenath and its surrounding settlements and called it Nobah after himself.

They changed the names of some of these places because they were named after false gods like Nebo and Baal. You would name a place after your god because you attributed your success to your god. Israel did the same many times. Ministry is not about what we do but about what we believe God will do through us by faith. And so let's give Him the glory we deserve.

I was crunching some numbers the other day and I realized I have preached over 1400 messages here over 31 and ½ years. And according to your own words, they are all good. And that doesn't count the similar number of bible studies and probably a hundreds of Sunday school lessons. And if they are all as good as you claimed they were, why do we need anymore? Surely we have covered almost every facet of the Christian life in all that time. Surely we have spoken about the blessings of obedience and consequences of disobedience more than enough times that we should

be walking with God wholeheartedly, all the time. Yet, like the kids in the back seat of a long car trip, we're not there yet. Why?

Clearly, we're not lacking bible knowledge. What are we lacking? Faith in God and commitment to one another. Ch, 32 is simply a great chapter about God's people believing what God said and acting in faith to do what God said He could do through a committed community of believers. I pray that's what you want because that's what I want for us. Let's each take a silent minute and talk to God about what each of us needs to do to help us all be a committed body of believers trusting what God says and acting on it by faith with each other.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net