



THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

God's Travel Tips

SERMON BY REV. SU KIM ■ NOVEMBER 21, 2021

Introduction

It's the holiday season and we all hope this will be a more "normal" holiday season. Holiday travel certainly looks to be back to normal. Travel experts have seen demand close to, if not exceeding, pre-COVID numbers. As of the first week of November, bookings for flights were up nearly 80% over last year and even slightly ahead of 2019! AAA anticipates that for Thanksgiving, more than 53.4 million will travel, the highest single-year increase since 2005. With COVID lasting so long, it appears there is a lot of pent-up demand, and that could mean a lot of new records. For example, there was more demand for Halloween; this year, Americans are predicted to have spent a record \$10.14 billion for Halloween. So, it seems that after the holiday season of 2020, there will be a lot of demand which could make this a record-breaking travel season! But the one record no one is talking about, the one I think will bounce back the strongest, possibly shattering every record ever, is the number of "Are we there yet?"s!

Just about every parent has experienced the joys of traveling with children. But do you realize that our heavenly Father also has experienced the same joys of traveling with His children? In fact, today's text is the biblical version of "Are we there yet?"

We're going to be reading from Numbers 11:1-3 today, but first, a bit of background. In all likelihood, the Book of Numbers isn't on the top ten favorite books of the Bible list of many people. The book gets its name from the Greek word for Numbers, which was a reference to the census of Israel taken in Numbers 1 and 26. Some of the chapters read about as excitingly as you might expect a census to read. But the Hebrew title is, "In the wilderness," which gives a more accurate picture of the contents of this fourth book of the Bible. As a biblically-centered church, we believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and the Lord has much to teach us, His disciples, from Numbers.

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the Lord promised Abraham that He would give him many descendants and the land of Canaan, and that through his descendants all the people of the earth would be blessed. Then the Book of Exodus details how Abraham's descendants had indeed become numerous—but they were not in Canaan, the land promised. They were in Egypt. And they were not a blessing to all the nations of the earth; they were slaves. The Book of Exodus tells us how God freed the people of Israel from slavery through the Passover: the sacrifice of a spotless lamb. God freed His people and led them by many signs and wonders. He made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai where He gave them the Ten Commandments and revealed His character as a gracious and compassionate God who is slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. The people constructed a tabernacle, essentially a tent, which was filled by the Presence of God. In the third book, Leviticus, we learn how a holy and righteous God can dwell with a sinful people.

And now, we come to the Book of Numbers. The people of Israel had become numerous. If you like organization and keeping things nice and tidy, you'll love how organized the Israel-

ites were at the Lord's command. In the first nine chapters of Numbers, the word "command" is repeated over and over; phrases like "As the LORD commanded" or "According to all that the LORD commanded" occur 14 times in those nine chapters. For example, "Thus did the people of Israel; they did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses" (Numbers 1:54). God had organized the people into tribes assigned to a certain space, all surrounding the Presence of the LORD which was at the center of the camp. What a beautiful picture of a well-ordered life!

By Numbers 9, the Israelites had been at Mount Sinai for about a year. They had celebrated the Passover and God was ready to fulfill His promise to lead His people to the Promised Land—the land He had promised their forefather Abraham. The journey from Mount Sinai to Canaan should have taken roughly two weeks. It should have been like our preparing for a long-awaited, long-anticipated family trip! The car would be packed including the food and snacks, the mail put on hold, and depending upon your generation, all the print maps and the AAA Tour book or mixtape would be on hand; everyone would be ready to go!

The Israelites' trip began in chapter 10. The pillar of cloud that had been at the center of their community began to move, and the people began to follow. The Presence of the LORD, visible in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, led them. They set out from Mount Sinai and had traveled three days when Numbers 11:1-3 says,

And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts

of the camp. ²Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. ³So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

Three days! If this were a long road trip, it would have been like the kids complaining before you had even merged onto I-75! In the original language of the passage, we are told that theirs was an ongoing, repetitive, and particularly intense form of complaining. It would have been like, “Are we there yet?! ARE WE THERE YET?! ARE WE THERE YET?!” They were complaining about all the misfortunes that had befallen them. The contrast could not have been greater! They went from doing all that the Lord had commanded to complaining. In fact, this was the first of seven incidents in which the Israelites, even Moses, rebelled against God’s provision and plans.

For example, for the rest of chapter 11, the Israelites complained about the food God provided them. They lamented that the food had been better in Egypt where they had cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic to eat; now they just had manna. What was God’s response? He judged the people. Fire consumed the outskirts of the camp which certainly caused some damage and perhaps even cost some lives. The people cried out to the Lord, and He relented. That happened over and over again in the Book of Numbers: The Lord’s people complained, the Lord judged them, the people cried out, and the Lord showed them mercy.

Brothers and sisters, we have to understand something about God: He is an awesome and sovereign God! Yes, God is love. Yes, God is merciful. But God is also a righteous judge. God is not some cuddly, comfortable deity we can disregard, dis-

respect, discount, or disdain. In Exodus 20, after the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments, the people saw thunder and lightning, the mountain was covered in smoke, and they “trembled with fear.” They stayed at a distance “and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die’” (Exodus 20:19).

Yes, God showed mercy to the Israelites when they cried out, despite their complaining after just three days. God continued to show mercy as they continued to reject His provision, His promises, and His plan, time and time again. Despite all that God had done, the Lord’s people refused to believe that He would fulfill His promise, and their refusal sealed their fate. What was supposed to have been a 2-week journey took nearly 40 years. Except for Joshua and Caleb, an entire generation died in the wilderness and never entered the Promised Land. Even Moses himself did not enter the Promised Land. If we repeatedly refuse God, we too will seal our fate.

If you have never put your trust in Jesus Christ, as 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “the right time is now. Today is the day of salvation.” None of us are guaranteed tomorrow. Don’t delay. Jesus taught extensively about the coming judgment. The Holy Spirit has been leading you. The Book of Numbers serves as a warning that if you continue to reject and refuse a loving and merciful God, He will give you what you want: an eternity separated from Him.

For those who trust in the Lord, although you may or may not be traveling this holiday season, each one of us is on the journey called life. And like the Israelites, our journey through life can often feel like a journey through the wilderness. From the Book of Numbers, we can learn some of God’s travel tips.

First, have a proper perspective on the past. Just like the Israelites, we can romanticize the past. The Israelites only remembered the good things about Egypt. They forgot about the 400 years of slavery and the killing of their firstborn sons. Being a disciple of Christ is not easy. Jesus told us that if we want to be His disciples, we must take up the cross daily and follow Him. But remember, He brought the Israelites out of the slavery of sin; He brought them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Second, be content with God's provision and give thanks in the present. Just as God provided for His people in the wilderness, our God will continue to provide for His people now. As the Book of Numbers warns us, don't give in to your desires—they are a terrible guide. Instead, give thanks to God. Each day leading up to Thanksgiving, spend a few moments in reflection and prayer, and thank God for a blessing or a provision He has given you.

Finally, believe that God will safely lead you home. Despite the repeated failures of His people at the end of the Book of Numbers, God in His mercy provided for the descendants of the rebellious generation that was poised to enter the Promised Land. The Lord freed His people through the sacrifice of the spotless lamb at Passover. The Lord led His people through the wilderness, and the Lord gave them the Promised Land.

About four years ago in January 2018, I was at this church for a remarkable two and a half week internship. (And, by the way, some gifted students will be here with us in January, and I'm sure they will be warmly welcomed by this amazing church.) At the end of my stay, my wife and I didn't know when we would be in Florida again—we knew that we would certainly never live in Florida—so we decided to go to Disney World. That trip is long, and the drive is not very scenic. As often hap-

pens, we got a late start, so we were getting to Disney World quite late and were tired. I thought I must have been hallucinating when all of a sudden, I saw mouse ears in the distance! Sure enough, a power transmission tower was topped with mouse ears! My excitement started to build as I saw mouse ears everywhere, and then I beheld it: the Magic Kingdom! I was sure I heard a chorus of angels. All the money we had paid to get our family of seven to Disney World was worth it just to see the smile on my kids' faces when they laid eyes on it in the distance.

What will it be like seeing the face of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? What will it be like when we lay eyes on the Kingdom of God? Will our journey in life that seems so long at times, and that seems to cost so much, be worth it when we see not the Magic Kingdom but our heavenly kingdom? During our life's journey, the Lord frees us through Jesus Christ, our perfect, spotless Passover lamb. He leads us through the wilderness of life to the very real presence of the Holy Spirit. The Lord will lead us safely to our eternal home with Him! As John 14:12 says, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"

Conclusion

The Book of Numbers teaches us that God is faithful, but that He will allow us to face the consequences of not trusting in Him. Our spiritual forefathers made many mistakes on their journey to the Promised Land. Don't repeat them. Maintain a proper perspective on the past, be content in God's provision, give thanks, and believe that God will safely lead us through the wilderness to our eternal home with Him. Our sovereign God, who freed us from our past, who provides for us in the present, and who will keep His promises to us in the future, is faithful. Believe in Him as you journey through the highs and the lows life. God is faithful. Trust in Him! ■



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