

Sermon #04 — *Christ in Numbers*

Title: **GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE**

Text: Numbers 3:1-51

Subject: *The Levitical Priesthood — God's Chosen*

Date: Tuesday Evening — January 7, 2020

Readings: *Merle Hart and Jimmy Bowman*

Introduction:

I want to talk to you tonight about **GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE**. That's my subject — **GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE**. My text will be the 3rd chapter of the Gospel of Numbers. — Numbers chapter 3 — **GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE**.

It is always important to remind ourselves as we read the accounts of the Old Testament that everything written in the Old Testament was typical and allegorical. All that is written there is for our learning, to teach us in type and picture the gospel of God, to show us Christ crucified and God's salvation in him, by him, and with him (1 Corinthians 10:11). All the Old Testament teaches is about Christ and his work and the people for whom the work of Christ was performed.

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Proposition: Here, in Numbers 3, God the Holy Ghost gives us a picture of **GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE** in the Lord's choice of the tribe of Levi to be his priesthood. We know that because God the Spirit tells us precisely that in 1st Peter 2:1-10).

(1 Peter 2:1-10) Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, (2) As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: (3) If so be ye have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious. (4) To whom coming, *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, *and* precious, (5) Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (6) Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. (7) Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the

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same is made the head of the corner, (8) And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. (9) **But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:** (10) Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Verse 1 — **This chapter begins in a very unusual way.** — **Aaron's name is here mentioned before Moses'**. Why? — In every other place where to two are mentioned together (except when speaking of Aaron being older than Moses), Aaron is mentioned behind Moses. Here his name is mentioned before, as if giving Aaron superiority.

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(Numbers 3:1) These also *are* the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day *that* the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai.

Aaron is here held before us in his priestly character with his priestly family. And being God's priest he typified our Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, a priest after the order of Melchisedec, who supersedes the law represented by Moses (Hebrews 7:12, 15-16).

Verses 2-4 — Then, in verses 2-4, the Holy Spirit reminds us of Aaron's two rebel sons, **Nadab and Abihu**, who died in the tabernacle because they offered strange fire to the Lord.

- Let no one presume to come to God with any sacrifice except that which God has given — Christ Jesus!
- Reprobates are sometimes found among those who are esteemed as God's faithful servants.

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The tribe of Levi was chosen of God to be his priestly tribe. To them all things pertaining to the worship and service of God were committed.

- Just as the gospel is trusted to the hands of God's chosen pastors and preachers.
- Just as the things of God are committed to the hands of his church and people.

(Numbers 3:5-10) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (6) Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. (7) And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. (8) And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. (9) And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they *are* wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel. (10) And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and

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they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

Verses 11-15 — **The Levites were taken for the firstborn.**

- Christ is Jehovah's Firstborn.
- God's elect are the church of the firstborn.

Verses 16-39 — **It appears that Levi was the smallest of all the tribes of Israel.** So it is in all ages that "*few are chosen.*" God's chosen are always in the minority, the despised few.

Verses 40-43 — **As Levi was accepted as a substitute for the firstborn so Christ is accepted of God as a substitute for God's elect.**

(Numbers 3:40-43) And the LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names. (41) And thou shalt take the Levites for me (I *am* the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the

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children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstlings among the cattle of the children of Israel. (42) And Moses numbered, as the LORD commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel. (43) And all the firstborn males by the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those that were numbered of them, were twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen.

Verses 44-51 — **As the Levites were all redeemed by the atonement money God required, by the shekel of the sanctuary, so God's elect are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ** (1 Peter 1:18-19).

(1 Peter 1:18) Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; (19) But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

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GRACE PICTURED

Alright, let's go back to verse 5. Let me show you how his choice of Levi portrays **GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE** as it is proclaimed in, the gospel.

(Numbers 3:5) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (6) Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. (7) And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. (8) And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.

(Numbers 8:5) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (6) Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. (7) And

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thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and *so* make themselves clean.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

1st — **Here we have a picture of the sovereign grace of God in the salvation of the elect.** How we ought to rejoice and give thanks to our God for his free, unconditional election! The tribe of Levi was typical of the elect both in nature and in grace.

- They were the priesthood. As such, they pictured the elect of God, whom Christ made righteous kings and priests unto God.
- That is part of our predestinated conformity to Christ, who is the King of kings and the High Priest and Jehovah-tsidkenu, The Lord Our Righteousness.
- God's saints, all believers, are God's priests, a chosen generation and a royal priesthood and the righteousness of God.

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So when we look at God dealing with Levi, we see God dealing with the sinner saved by grace and appointed to the lofty place of service unto God, to offer acceptable sacrifices by Jesus Christ.

There was nothing about Levi to give him superiority above his brethren — Nothing that made him appealing to God. In fact, Levi was, by nature, a vile, base, depraved, murderous man. His nature was just like that of any other man. I stress this point because I want you to see the kind of people who make up God's elect priesthood. — Look at Levi and his brother are described in Genesis 49:5-7.

(Genesis 49:5-7) Simeon and Levi *are* brethren; instruments of cruelty *are in* their habitations. (6) O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. (7) Cursed *be* their anger, for *it was* fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

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Jacob here refers to the deceitful and murderous actions that Levi took against Shechem, the son of Hamor in Genesis 34 (Shechem defiled Dinah. So Simeon and Levi slaughtered all the men of the city and took Dinah home.)

Simeon and Levi were wicked and cruel, deceitful and full of self-will. Jacob being set forth as a type of the Holy Lord God says that his honor could not unite with them. Nor would he enter into their secret. That is a pretty good picture of the relationship of the Holy God with sinful man. His eyes are too pure to behold evil and he will by no means clear the guilty.

There is another man in Scripture who was widely known for his fierceness and cruelty. He held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death for the gospel's sake. He wreaked havoc in the church and went about to rid the earth of the name of Christ. He too was arrested in his career and put to the business of minding the tabernacle of God. His name was Saul of Tarsus and after the grace of God came upon him

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he wrote, “*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*” In another place he wrote “*Unto me , who am less than the least of saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*”

Levi and Paul both are examples of what it takes to save cruel, fierce, wicked men. — Only the free and sovereign, omnipotent and irresistible grace of God will suffice!

- By nature we all have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.
- Yet, by grace we have been made righteous priests and made fit for the service of God!

All the elect are by nature vile, God-hating rebels. Destruction and misery are in their ways. With their mouth they have used deceit The poison of asps is under their tongue. But, glory to his name, God has visited us in sovereign mercy. By the accomplishments of his Son he has made us priests.

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THE CHANGE

2nd — **To see the glory of God's sovereign grace, we need only to observe the change wrought in sinners by it.** Look at the difference between the description of Levi's position in nature in Genesis 34 and his position in grace in Numbers 3.

How is it that God brings such a sinner from the dunghill to be seated among princes? You will see the answer to that question in Numbers 8:5-7.

(Numbers 8:5-7) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (6) Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. (7) And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and *so* make themselves clean.

On what ground can God, being just and holy, bring a wretch like Levi, such a one as you, as me, to be his

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honored priest? Note well that Levi did not volunteer for the job. He did not make a move toward God. By nature he wanted to be as far from God as he could get. — **He was chosen by God and brought to God by grace, omnipotent, irresistible, free grace** (Psalms 65:4; 110:3; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Ephesians 2:1-10).

(Psalm 65:4) Blessed *is the man whom* thou choosest, and causest to approach *unto thee, that* he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, *even* of thy holy temple.

(Psalm 110:3) Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

(1 Corinthians 1:30-31) But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is

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written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

(Ephesians 2:1-10) And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: (7) That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the

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gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Illustration: *“Fetch him!”*

Levi's self-will had no inclination toward God, no affinity to cause him to want to approach unto God. Ah! But grace had designs on him. God had both inclination and affinity toward him. And God's self-will caused Levi to come. — *“Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto thee.”*

PURIFYING, WASHING, SHAVING

In verse 7 we have a clear portrayal of the principle of divine cleansing. God uses three things in the work of grace. These three things represent the work of grace. Purifying and washing and shaving picture the work of Christ in cleansing the sinner by his precious

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blood through his Word, and the cutting off of that which grows by nature. How wonderful the Word of God is!

(Titus 3:3-7) For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, *and* hating one another. (4) But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, (5) Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (6) Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; (7) That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

- **The water of purifying speaks of the work of God the Holy Ghost sprinkling our consciences with the blood of Christ, declaring us pure, righteous, holy, justified by**

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God (Hebrews 9:8-14). — Faith embraces the testimony of God!

- **Shaving hair off the body portrayed the believer's renunciation of all personal righteousness**, denying any merit or worth of anything and everything that comes out of man.
- **The shaving of hair also tells us that nothing of nature is useful in the service of God!**
- **And the shaving of hair is something that has to be done continually.** — Even after we are made new creatures in Christ, the old hair of corruption keeps growing! — The old man cannot be reformed. He must be cut off!
- **The washing of clothes represented the renewing of the Holy Ghost, the new birth, righteousness imparted by grace, the new creation of grace** (Hebrews 10:9-14, 18-22).

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(Hebrews 10:9-22) Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. (10) By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. (11) And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: (12) But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; (13) From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. (14) For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (15) *Whereof* the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, (16) This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; (17) And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. (18) Now where remission of these *is, there is* no more offering for sin. (19) Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, (20) By a new and living way,

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which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; (21) And *having* an high priest over the house of God; (22) Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

One of the first lessons that the Spirit of God teaches is that your nature is judged, condemned, and sentenced to death. Know this, that whatever is produced by nature is condemned by God and will never be used in the service of the priesthood. That is the declaration of believer's baptism (Romans 6:6-11; 8:12-13).

(Romans 6:6-11) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (7) For he that is dead is freed from sin. (8) Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: (9) Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead

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dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. (10) For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. (11) Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Romans 8:12-13) Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. (13) For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

You are purified by the blood of Christ, made righteous by God.

- By the Decree of God! — Predestination!
- By the Justice of God! — Redemption!
- By the Grace of God! — Regeneration!

The washing of the clothes is representative of self-judgment or self-condemnation, the condemnation of our nature from our own heart. It is a personal, continual reckoning that the old man is dead. We are

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priests, God's Levites. As such, we must cross the line drawn in the sand and find ourselves on the Lord's side (Exodus 32:24-29). Then we must put our swords on our sides and go out to slay everything about us that would worship the golden calf, the idols manufactured by our flesh and our nature. It's the water and the razor. It is purifying yourself even as Christ is pure, hating even the garment spotted with the flesh.

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE

3rd — **In Numbers 8:8 we see God's acceptance of Christ and of us in, by, with, and because of Christ.**

(Numbers 8:8) Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, *even* fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering.

Both a sin offering and a burnt offering symbolized the life of the priest. Both represented the death of

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Christ as the Lamb of God. Yet each had a different distinction as to the believer's confession of faith.

- **The burnt offering pictured Christ fulfilling the will of God and the voluntary sacrifice of himself for his people.** — It showed that Christ's work when he was made sin for us, his death accomplished God's will in the salvation of the elect.

This work was between God and his Son and it resulted in the full acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, to the full satisfaction of God's holiness, law, justice, righteousness, and truth. Christ being accepted (fire represents justice satisfied), it followed that all who were in him were accepted by God also.

This offering pictured acceptance before God that was wholly accomplished by another. The believer placed his hands on the head of the offering but did not confess his sin. The act of placing his hands on the head of the sacrifice was identifying with the accomplishment or the acceptance of Christ. He was

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saying that the merits of the sacrifice were transferred to him. He was by this act saying that he was accepted before God. He was confessing that he was righteous before God and accepted.

- **The sin offering also represented the death of Christ, but differed in that represented the sins of the believer being put away by the sacrifice of Christ.** Here the believer put his hands on the head of the sacrifice to symbolize his sins being transferred to the victim.

The sin offering was a confession of sin with the knowledge that God was just to forgive sin because he had already accepted the burnt offering and accepted them in it. The sin offering was for those who were already accepted through the merits of the burnt offering. Only those who are trusting the merits of Christ, believing they are accepted wholly upon those merits, are qualified to confess their sin to the God who is just to forgive them.

ATONEMENT MADE

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4th — Finally, note the order of the sacrifices in verse 12.

(Numbers 8:12) And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one *for* a sin offering, and the other *for* a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites.

Here the sin offering is first mentioned and then the burnt offering. This is the reverse of their revelation. In Leviticus we find the burnt offering in Chapter 1 and the sin offering in Chapter 4 This is a sweet reminder that all of salvation was accomplished by Christ alone.

Thinking on this order turn to 2nd Corinthians 5:21.

(2 Corinthians 5:16-21) Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more. (17)

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Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (18) And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Do you see the order? Our sin transferred to Christ, his righteousness (our acceptance) transferred to us. Sons of Levi, rejoice! Look at two passages and I'll quit (Malachi 2:4-6 and Deuteronomy 33:8-11).

(Malachi 2:4-6) And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my

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covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. (5) My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him *for* the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. (6) The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

(Deuteronomy 33:8-11) And of Levi he said, *Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah;* (9) Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. (10) They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. (11) Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that

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rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.

Amen.