

The Death of a Nation

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Bible Verse: Numbers
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Tonight we sort of return to the book of Psalms after completing our little review of creation and worldview issues from the book of Genesis and we're up to Psalm 78 in our sequential study of the Psalms and that's where we're going to turn next week. I know that sounds kind of a funny way to introduce things but Psalm 78 is the second longest Psalm in the entire Psalter, it's some 72 verses I believe, something like that. It is a long recitation of the lessons to be learned from the history of the nation Israel up to that point, and to give us an opportunity to actually be able to glean some things from Psalm 78, I wanted to take tonight to review some of the things of the history of Israel that Psalm 78 will be drawing upon next week as we study through that. So what we're going to do, is we're going to go back to something that we studied several years ago for tonight that will help prepare us for Psalm 78 in the book of Numbers. The book of Numbers in the Old Testament, and we're going to spend some time here to review some of the history of the nation of Israel understanding that that's laying the foundation for us for next week as we go to Psalm 78 and this will kind of give us a running start into Psalm 78 here.

You'll recall that in the book of Exodus God gave birth to the nation of Israel and he gave them laws in the book of Leviticus to show how they were to approach him and now the nation of some two and half million people were setting out for the Promised Land, and as you know, it didn't go very long before things kind of went south on them. If you'll look at Numbers 10, we'll kind of pick up the story midstream with those things in mind. Numbers 10:11, the people were now across the river, they were ready to enter into the Promised Land, at least geographically ready, and in Numbers 10:11, we read this,

11 Now in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; 12 and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran.

So that's the setting, that's the starting point where we pick it up kind of midstream, if you will, and what the book of Numbers teaches us, what it shows us, what we're going to see in Psalm 78 as well, is that this massive group of people were not ready to be the people of God, and what Numbers shows us is it shows us you could say the death of a nation as Israel fell into sin in the wilderness, and Numbers illustrates some very basic principles, biblical principles about the nature of spiritual life. It shows Israel in their sin, it shows

God's judgment, and it also still somehow manages to show his grace and we're going to survey Numbers in a very quick way here this evening.

First of all, I want you to see the sin of the people. The sin of the people, and the book of Numbers in some ways is a very discouraging read in some ways because you see these people that God had delivered from slavery responding with grumbling and with sin. You'll remember from the book of Exodus, that God had provided manna for them to eat day after day, twice on Saturday they received, or twice just before the Sabbath they received miraculous manna from the sky and they went out and gathered it as God directly fed them.

Look at Exodus 16 with me. Exodus 16 by way of reminder of some of these things. It's been four or five years since we looked at these things on Tuesday evening. In Exodus 16:4 after God had delivered them from Egypt and drowned the army in the Red Sea,

4 ... the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction."

Then in verse 35 in Exodus 16, we see just this overview statement,

35 The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

And here's the question, a simple question to ask with all of this miraculous provision going on day after day, the Lord faithfully feeding them for 40 years: were the people grateful? Was the nation thankful that their God was providing for them in such a consistent way, so consistently providing for their needs? The answer is no, they weren't. They manifested their sin instead and they manifested sin in three different ways. First of all, they rejected their circumstances.

Now we can go back to the book of Numbers in chapter 11 and time is going to forbid us a thorough review, I just want you to see some summary statements of what we find in the book of Numbers remembering that this is laying a foundation for what we're going to look at next week in Psalm 78.

Numbers 11:1,

1 Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD; and when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.

Why did they complain? Well, they hated their circumstances. They hated their circumstances even though they had been miraculously delivered from Egypt and they

had an experience of God's deliverance unlike any nation had known before as they followed the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, they were miserably unhappy.

Look at verse 4,

4 The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."

With contempt they looked upon the provision of the Lord.

Now, we've talked about this many times: God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt so that they would be a kingdom of priests; that they would mediate the presence and the knowledge of God to the kingdoms around them. You see that in Exodus 19. Here's the question: how can a people that hate him and hate their circumstances possibly be an effective mediator for their God? They hated their circumstances. They grumbled under what God had given to them and you see that this is off to a very bad start.

Not only that, not only did they reject their circumstances, they rejected their leadership. They rejected the leadership that God had given to them. This is all part of the manifestation of their sin. They were jealous of Moses and they demanded an equal voice even though God had clearly appointed Moses to be the leader of the people.

Look at Numbers 12, beginning in verse 1. Numbers 12:1-2,

1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); 2 and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" And the LORD heard it.

And this grumbling against Moses gives us a further window into the nature of their hearts. We see the spirit that was animating them. They rejected their circumstances, they rejected and complained against the leadership that God had given them, and their ultimate rejection of God's purpose for them is seen in a fateful event. Thirdly, they rejected the Promised Land itself. They rejected the Promised Land itself. You remember that God had had Moses send spies into Canaan in order to spy out the land.

Look at Numbers 13, beginning in verse 1. Numbers 13:1 and 2,

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 2 "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them."

So 12 men go out to scout the land on behalf of the entire nation and they are going to bring back a collective report about the nature of the land and about the people and whether they would be able to succeed in a military venture against them. And what happened? When the spies returned, the majority report, 10 out of the 12 said that the land was a good land but that the people were too strong for Israel to overcome.

Look at verse 25 of chapter 13.

25 When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days,
26 they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the
congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh;
and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and
showed them the fruit of the land. 27 Thus they told him, and said, "We
went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk
and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless, the people who live in the
land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover,
we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 Amalek is living in the land of
the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in
the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of
the Jordan."

So there is this report that is filled with fear; that is filled with an intimidating report to the people saying, "We can't handle this. We can't go there. Even though the land is good, it's not possible for us. The people are too strong that live there for us to overcome them."

Then in verse 30 you see the man Caleb stepping up,

30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by
all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it."
31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up
against the people, for they are too strong for us." 32 So they gave out to
the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying,
"The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that
devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of
great size. 33 There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part
of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and
so we were in their sight."

So step back and just kind of remember what all is going on here. This great people had experienced a great deliverance at the hands of a great God and God had promised them that they would inherit this land that he had sent them to. He provides for them in their daily needs with manna from heaven. He appoints leadership for them and he sends spies to spy out the land. Everything about their circumstances spoke to the fact that God was going to provide for them, that God was a great God and that all that they needed to do

was go forward and trust him and they would experience the deliverance that God had given to them. But what did the people do? They rejected all of that.

Look at chapter 14, beginning in verse 1,

1 Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.

Why are you crying? What is there to cry about when this God is your God? But that's what they did.

Verse 2,

2 All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

Now, beloved, this is a complete and total rejection of the God who had saved them, of the God who had delivered them. They literally said in what I just read, "We prefer the slavery that we had in Egypt over the future that God has for us in the land that he has promised to us," and there were only two people who dissented against that conclusion.

Look at verses 6 through 9,

6 Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us--a land which flows with milk and honey. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."

So Caleb and Joshua, speaking by faith, speaking by confidence in the word that the Lord had given to them earlier, says, "No, we must go forward. We can go forward. God will provide. God will deliver these people into our hands."

Now, let me just point out a matter of arithmetic to you for your benefit and for your spiritual strength. Notice that Caleb and Joshua were the distinct minority. It was a 10 to 2 vote, 10 to 2 in favor of returning to Egypt. Beloved, do you see that truth is not necessarily found with majority opinion? I realize that we live our national life driven by polls and by majority vote and the majority rules. Understand that when you step into the

spiritual life that Christ has given to us, that truth is often found in the minority. In fact, turn to Matthew 7 just to reinforce this point. It's possible that this could be the most important spiritual principle that someone in the room tonight could hear, that you do not determine truth, you do not determine what is right by majority vote but rather by the true and revealed and spoken word of God.

Matthew 7:13, Jesus elucidates this same principle in a different context when he says,

13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.
14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

If you want to follow the majority, understand that it is going to lead you to destruction according to the words of Christ; that it is the broad way that is the way of danger; that the disciple of Christ does not find safety in numbers but rather finds safety in the revealed word of God, and Christ warns us not to choose that broad way.

Now, beloved, for a congregation like ours, a church like ours, it's important for us to remember this. We're mindful of the fact that we swim upstream even against the current of thoughts of broad evangelicalism. We realize that some of our convictions don't set well with even those who profess Christ with their lips. We understand all of that. We realize that we might be standing in a corner without too many friends around us and we are perfectly okay with that as long as we understand why we believe what we believe, as long as we are standing within the four corners of the revealed word of God in the 66 books of the Bible. We are not trying to simply join with the majority. We're not trying to be with the popular crowd. If popularity comes, great, but it's incidental to us. What we want is to be true to the word of God and true to the God of the word. That's what matters to us and we don't care, we are not intimidated when people speak against that, and we see and we draw comfort from the word of our own Lord who said, "The way that leads to life is narrow. There are not many who find it." We draw comfort from the fact that to the best of our earnest desire we would stand in the shoes of Caleb and Joshua, not in the sandals of the 10 who rejected what God had for them.

So we must understand that most basic point, the fact that popular opinion goes in a different direction is no indication of what is true and, beloved, it is no indication of what is safe for your soul. People say, "Can the billions of people in the Catholic Church be wrong?" Well, yeah. Actually they could and they are. There is no safety in numbers, beloved. There is no safety in counting noses. Your safety is found in the word of God alone. Your safety is found in Christ alone, and for the true disciple of Christ, he counts the cost, he realizes that sometimes that means he will stand alone, so to speak; if you're in a church like ours, you're never alone absolutely because there are like-minded believers around you, but sometimes in family, you'll stand alone. Sometimes in academics, you'll stand alone. Sometimes even within the Christian church, you might stand alone, and that's okay. We care much more about being faithful to our God than what men think. We are driven by a fear of the living God, not by the fear of men whose

breath is in their nostrils, and we must have that clear in our minds so that we are able to stand firm against the crosscurrents that come against us.

Israel here as a nation failed on this very point and so the danger is exposed and brought to our attention through the word of God, and so what happens here as we go back to Numbers 14, what you see going on here is a colossal tragedy because these people are rejecting the purpose of their national existence. They are rejecting the very reason that they existed. After the report of Caleb and Joshua exhorting them to trust, exhorting them to obedience, exhorting them to stay on the path, look at verse 10.

10 ... all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

Now, just one last time, remember the historical context of what's going on here. God had delivered them from Egypt with signs and wonders, with 10 great colossal signs to pharaoh, the greatest man on earth at the time. God delivers his people and shows his supernatural ability and his supernatural control over all of the elements, ultimately slaying the firstborn of all of Egypt and leading them out and leading them through the sea and destroying the greatest army that was chasing after them. How, then, could these people disbelieve? How could they turn their back on all of that? Well, beloved, only the controlling power of sin in the heart could explain such rebellion. These were sinful unbelieving people who were rejecting everything that had been set forth before them.

So what can we say? What is the outcome of this? Beloved, here's what I want you to see as we lead into our second point for this evening, the second point that we're going to see is the judgment of God on them, but what I want you to see as we start to enter into this review of the judgment of God on the people, is that sin brings inevitable judgment and what we need to see and what we need to have in our mind as we go through this is that the judgment of God on such disobedience and unbelief is just. It is right. It is not right for the people of Israel to have rejected everything that God had done for them; to have rejected the revelation that was right in front of them and to prefer slavery over what God had promised to give to them. That's not right. That is culpable unbelief. It is culpable disobedience that cries out for judgment against it, and in like manner today, Scripture says that day by day, hour by hour, the entire world is exposed to a general revelation from God found in the skies. "Day to day pours forth speech," Psalm 19 says, declaring to them the power and something of the attributes of God, that there is a Creator to whom they are accountable and they reject it, Romans 1. They suppress it. They deny it. They define it out of existence in their own minds contrary to the testimony of their own conscience within.

Beloved, what we have to see is that this is not an innocent mistake. This is culpable unbelief. This is culpable rejection of the revelation of God to say nothing about the rejection of the revelation of God found in his word. This is a fearsome guilt, a fearsome culpability that calls forth great judgment. And for those of you in the room that are dwelling in your unbelief, I just beg you once more to recognize the guilt of that; to stand apart, to push away Christ in the midst of all of the revelation that God has given to you

is a culpable matter of judgment. I call you to repent while there is still time, to come to faith in Christ while there is still time to flee from that wrath that is to come.

Well, let's look at the judgment that God brings upon people in kind of reviewing the different things that we looked at earlier. When Miriam challenged Moses, we saw earlier God struck her, Numbers 12:9. Numbers 12:9, earlier they had spoken against Moses, now in verse 9 we see that,

9 ... the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed. 10 But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous.

But the surpassing judgment in Numbers was upon the people for rejecting the Promised Land.

Look at Numbers 14:26,

26 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. 28 Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; 29 your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. 30 Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.'"

There would be two people of the adults who believed in God and they would enter. God says everyone else will perish.

Look at verse 31,

31 ""Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey--I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. 32 But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. 33 Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. 34 According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition. 35 I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.'"

Wow. Every adult except two would fall in the wilderness. They had an immediate death sentence pronounced upon them that would be carried out over the course of the next four

decades and they were all going to die as a result of their rejection of the promises of God and the word of God.

If this seems harsh to you, if it seems harsh to us, it is because we don't understand. It's because we are not seeing it from the perspective of God. God had shown great signs and provided for them. God was God. God was holy. God was majestic. God had shown himself, God had proven himself again and again and again, and in the face of the fullness of that self-manifestation from God, they said, "We don't want this." What do you mean you don't want it? God saved you, meaning he delivered you from slavery. How can you reject that? No, if we think that this is harsh, it's because we are overlooking something primary, something central, something fundamental to all of existence: God is holy and sin against him is inexcusable. It is culpable. It is worthy of judgment. Beloved, this nation was not the victim of trying circumstances, their failure was not an understandable frustration with what they were experiencing, Scripture declares it to be culpable unbelief.

Look at the book of Hebrews 3 with me. Many men have commented that the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself and that is certainly the case in what we're considering here this evening. Hebrews 3:16, looking back on these events from the book of Numbers, the writer of Hebrews says,

16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Their unbelief was driving their rebellion and their unbelief was subject to the judgment of God. This is the consequence of sin.

Now, with all of that said, the sin and the rejection of their circumstances, the rejection of their leadership, their rejection of the Promised Land, they were swimming in oceans of guilt by this time, and with the declaration of God's judgment upon them, you might think that this is simply a book that just talks about sin and judgment but that would be a mistake, that would be the wrong way to look at it. It would be a mistake to miss the third aspect of what we want to see here this evening which is the grace of God. The grace of God even in the book of Numbers.

You know, it's the nature of God to be gracious. It's the nature of God to be merciful. He is kind by nature. Scripture says that God is love and we must be careful as we process these things in our mind not to take a view of God that views him as someone simply harsh and judgmental even in the Old Testament, perhaps we should say even especially in the Old Testament where we are so prone to hear people say that the God in the Old Testament was a God of wrath, but the New Testament God is a God of love, as if those two things were in conflict or the two testaments were not presenting a unified consistent

picture of the nature of God. That's not true. It's in the New Testament where we read the most about the revelation of the eternal judgment of God on sinners and eternal destruction in hell. That's where we read the most about that, where that is the most clearly revealed, and if we are to take the Old Testament on its own terms, we would find the grace of God woven throughout everything that is said. Was it not grace by which he delivered Noah and his family? Was it not by grace that he called Abraham and made promises that Abraham would be a blessing to all nations to come? Was it not grace by which he dealt with Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses? In light of everything that we've been looking at over the past several Sundays, is it not a testimony of great sovereign compassion, the grace that God showed to Jonah and showed to the city of Nineveh in saving them eternally from their sin? Beloved, don't let anyone present that dichotomy to you. Don't accept that dichotomy and view the God of the Old Testament in a wrong perspective. What we find as we read through the book of Numbers is this: is that God was gracious even to this rebellious people. He tempered judgment at times and provided means of relief for them.

Look at Numbers 21 as we just touch on these themes ever so briefly. Numbers 21, beginning in verse 7. Actually, we'll begin in verse 6. No, let's begin in verse 5. Ah, let's begin in Genesis 1. Let's just follow my inconsistency all the way through to its logical conclusion, right? Just go all the way back. Numbers 21:5,

5 The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." 6 The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

Now in verse 7 the people come to Moses with a measure of superficial repentance and they say,

7 ... "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people."

Now look, by this point God had already declared the judgment that was going to come upon them that they were going to die in the wilderness. We have seen their thorough going culpability for all of their unbelief and disobedience and grumbling against the Lord. You would think from a human perspective that God would just multiply the fiery serpents and let them go have a feast on the heels of the people of Israel. But that's not what he did.

Verse 8,

8 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." 9 And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on

the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

God showed mercy to them of a temporal sort even in the midst of their misery. Furthermore, to this people, to this nation, the second generation after this generation that died in the wilderness, they still received the Promised Land which was historically accomplished in the book of Joshua.

Look at Numbers 14:30 with me for just a moment. Numbers 14:30. I think I may have read this a little earlier. I did. That's okay, we'll look at it again. Numbers 14:30,

30 'Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you...
31 Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey--I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected.'

Beloved, what this shows us is this: is that the sin of that first generation in the wilderness did not frustrate God's ultimate purpose. Despite the greatness of their sin, God still blessed Israel in the end. The first generation forfeited the blessing but God would still have his nation and his nation would experience victory as Joshua led them; the nation would eventually experience expansion under David and Solomon; eventually the nation will see the fulfillment of all of the messianic promises when Jesus Christ returns for them in a day still future to us, and there is a worldwide revival of Jews coming to Christ. For all of the sin of this people against their God, God is still being faithful to them and will show it in even greater measure in a time still future to us.

Don't tell me, not that any of you would, speaking to an imaginary objector out in the inner lobby there, don't tell me that this God is not a gracious God. This is the God who sent his Son into the world to redeem sinners like this. Don't tell me that God isn't gracious to Israel. There is grace still ahead for them. Don't tell me that God is not gracious to sinners even today. Certainly those of you that are in Christ have been on the receiving end of grace you didn't deserve, right? You have received favor from God completely disproportionate. There is an inverse relationship between your guilt and the blessing that God has given to you. Grace in exchange for your sin. Where your sin abounded, God's grace abounded all the more. And even though our grumblings as Christians are not like the unbelieving grumblings of Israel in the desert, haven't we grumbled ourselves against the nature of circumstances that God gives us from time to time, and yet we find that he mercifully carries us and forgives us and cleanses us and continues to care for us in the midst of it? Isn't that true? So while on the one hand we look and we see the judgment of God and we tremble in fear, we see the grace and our hearts are warmed and we magnify him all the more as a result.

Look at Hebrews 3 with me again as we contemplate our take-away from these considerations that we'll see more next week in Psalm 78. Hebrews 3. There is a warning for us in this and the warning that we would be aware of is to beware of having simply merely an outward association with the people of God without the corresponding inner reality.

Chapter 3, verse 12 of Hebrews says,

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, 15 while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart, as when they provoked Me."

Then in Hebrews 4:1,

1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Then finally in verse 11, kind of our take-away here this evening,

11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

God has been gracious to us and God, for those of you that are not in Christ, is offering grace to you again even this evening. I never get tired of saying this. I hope although sometimes I wonder, whether anyone gets tired of hearing it but I never get tired of saying it. The patience of God and the grace of God in dealing with unbelieving people and offering them repeatedly again and again and again the abundant mercies that are found in his Son Jesus Christ are available even to those who have spurned it stubbornly until this day. It's not too late.

Look at John 3, another New Testament text drawing upon the things that we see in the book of Numbers. John 3. That serpent, that fiery serpent that Moses lifted up actually was pointing ahead to Christ and in John 3:14,

14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

Lifted up on a cross. Lifted up there where the payment for sin would be made. Lifted up on the cross where he would intercede for sinners and bear the wrath of God on their behalf. To what end? So that sinners could now work for their salvation? No, so that the grace of God could be manifested in this manner:

15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

Christian, isn't it wonderful to realize that God has worked in our hearts in a way to enable us to look at that one who is lifted up? To look and find in Christ the complete forgiveness of all of our sins? To find in Christ absolute security? To find in Christ one who will never cast us away? To find in Christ one who has said, "No one will pluck them from my hand"? In light of all of our many sins, to realize that that kind of grace has been provided to us in Christ, isn't your heart filled to overflowing with gratitude? With thanksgiving? Isn't your heart humbled before such magnificent grace?

And my unbelieving friend, why will you perish when that same grace is offered to you right now?

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we realize that our guilt against you was incalculable. We realize that we have sinned against you in many many ways and yet, Father, we find in Christ the one who has paid the price of all of our sin at Calvary; we find in Christ our brother who has loved our soul; we find in Christ a brother who has saved us; a brother who now names us and represents us in the very throne room of heaven; a brother who is not ashamed to call us such. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your great mercy on our souls and we realize that that mercy came at the cost of your own precious lifeblood, your perfect righteous life poured out in sacrifice for sinners like us. Thank you for the grace that you have shown to us. Father, we pray that we could draw the right lessons from it, the lessons of turning to Christ and turning away from sin; not grumbling against you but rather finding in every circumstance reason to give thanks.

Help us, our God, to that end, and Father, not only on an individual basis but, Father, we pray for our church. We pray for this congregation of believers and pray that you would sustain and direct us for many many years to come; that this place, this church, this body of believers might be those who stand without apology for the truthfulness of your word, for the clarity of the Gospel, unswayed by contrary currents in the church at large or in the world around us. Father, we gladly say to you as a congregation, we say to you corporately that we are more than glad to let the world pass us by, only let us be found in Christ, only let us be found faithful to him, only let us be found true to your word. That is the supreme and surpassing desire that we have and we pray that you would bless that to sanctify us through all of the joys and sorrows of life, to conform us to the image of Christ as we walk through on this fallen sod. And Father, we ask you yet again that you would use our corporate testimony, that you would use this church, that you would use our individual lives, that you would use this pulpit as instruments of grace, of converting grace in the hearts of unbelieving men and women and children throughout our area, wherever you take this word, O God, that you would use it to bring about true conversion that men, women and children would be born again as a result of the truth that is proclaimed through our corporate testimony. Father, that power does not belong to us, it belongs to you alone. We long to see you exercise it and manifest it multiplied times in our midst. And Father, we realize that as we look, we wait, and we wait dependently, we wait expectantly, we wait and we ask yet again, Father, that you would bring sinners to Christ and that we would have the joy of seeing the circle of faith

expanded as a result of the work that your Spirit does through us in our respective spheres of influence. Help us greatly to that end, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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