

Julie Guggenbiller  
Market Street Fellowship  
110529

## **Following the Lord Fully**

### **(or "Sticks and Stones")**

I'm going to take you on a little walk through three different portions of the bible: Numbers 10-15...the Wilderness stories...John 8- the story of the woman caught in adultery and finally, Hebrews 3/4.

I've been reading about how the children of Israel grumbled and complained about their "lot" in life...

And how they craved meat instead of manna so the Lord flooded them with quail until it made them vomit.

And about how they rose up against the word of the Lord as it was communicated to them through Moses and Aaron.....And how they wanted to choose new leaders and head back to Egypt....

And about how Miriam and Aaron, Moses' brother and sister, spoke against him and ended up with leprosy...

And about how the men who went into the Promised Land to spy out the land the Lord had given them - a land the Lord said was a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land He's given them for the possessing- and all but two of them came back with a bad report about it...

I found this interesting: in Numbers 13:18-20 Moses told the leaders who were headed into the land to "see what the land is like; whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many...whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or like fortresses... whether the land is rich or poor and whether there are forests there or not."

What struck me when I read that verse is that they'd already been told the Land was good and that the Lord was giving it to them, but Moses' parting words left room for each of them to either agree with the Lord's view OR see the Land through their own eyes-- through their individual human perspectives. The greatness and goodness and ultimate possession of the Land was an established fact according to the Lord, but they were still free to decide if they wanted to see things the way the Lord did or not.

And I guess the Lord has been dealing with my heart along those same lines. He keeps bringing me back to this idea that it's not enough to believe and know with my head how He feels about things-- or even to know that I'm supposed to feel the way He does. He keeps hammering home to me that all of this is REAL. And because this is REAL,

when push comes to shove, even when I'm in a tough place; even when the enemies look too big and strong to ever be conquered and it seems like the best thing to do is to just chuck the whole thing- because it's obviously impossible- and settle down somewhere just short of what is true...

Even when I feel misunderstood...or when I don't necessarily like things that are happening around me...Even when I'm offended or when I have a bunch of valid reasons as to why I'm right and everyone else is wrong.....

EVEN THEN, I need to be firmly committed to turning away from myself- from what my eyes see and what my heart feels is true- and bow my head and turn my heart to the Lord's understanding of things.

Years ago, Jason preached a sermon called A Heart To Know Him....Well this is kind of like my version of that sermon.

So back to the book of Numbers....I'm going to pick up in chapter 15:1 and just read a few highlighted verses and mention a few things that stuck out to me.

Numbers 15: 1, 2, 13, 14, 16, 22, 24, 26, 29-36....

**In the Land, there is one rule/law that applies to everyone**, both native born and stranger. God does not have human favorites. His Son is His favorite and we've been brought into Him...and so it is in Christ that we are loved and favored...In Christ are many souls who share His one Life, but many souls, many ideas, many opinions don't live and rule in the Land. There is a "One Life" principle that rules and governs in the Land, and God has no individual favorites! He is faithful to Himself. He is faithful to the Truth.

**In the Land God has provided a covering and forgiveness for unintentional sin.** It's a fact. We're all flesh. We're all going to behave badly at times, disappoint one another and ourselves, etc, and if those sins proceed out of blindness and immaturity, there is a covering and forgiveness for us in Christ. The whole congregation was told to burn a bull and it would be a sweet sacrifice before the Lord. And we know that every single offering and sacrifice spoke of Christ, represented Christ, foretold of Christ. So when God looked down on the camp, even though it contained people who were less than perfect, what He saw was the perfection of Christ being restored; What He smelled instead of the odor of death in the camp was the fragrance of Christ filling the camp....

**In the Land, there is NO covering for intentional sin.** Verse 30 says "If anyone does anything presumptuously, whether native born or stranger, he brings reproach on the Lord and he shall be completely cut off from his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him."

I looked up the word "presumptuous" and it means 'to act in a way that fails to observe the limits of what is permitted or appropriate...'

The Land is Christ and the boundaries of the Land are the boundaries of Truth. So if we intentionally choose live by our feelings, ideas, opinions, or anything that is not

according to the Truth as Christ knows it to be, we've basically brought something into Christ that doesn't belong there. And that sort of thing always resulted in the person being cut off from the rest of the camp-- in a place where there is no covering.

For those who are in Christ, forgiveness and covering for our accidental, unintentional adam nature is continually being administered on behalf of us by Christ -- thank goodness-- but reading that part about how God feels about someone who sins willfully/presumptuously kind of shook me up a little.

Now I'm not trying to scare you or lay a guilt trip upon you, but what was hitting me this past week was how deadly it is to resist the Truth....I am rather accustomed to saying "No" to Him because I think it's no big deal....But it IS a big deal.

Read verse 32-36...

One day this past week I read about the guy picking up sticks and I found myself thinking "gee whiz, Lord! It was just a bunch of sticks! It wasn't something worthy of death, was it?!"

And just the matter-of-factness about the Lord's response to the situation galled me a little: He said: "The man must SURELY be put to death." "SURELY??" I thought. Why surely??

Now just so you know, I KNOW the reason why the Lord was so matter-of-fact about the necessity of this man's death....I understand about the boundaries of Christ and why the death penalty was necessary, but deep inside what God said bugged me...and that stopped me in my tracks because I KNOW that the Lord isn't mean or unfair...He is Love and He is true...and that caused me to realize if something about the Truth is bugging me, the problem can't be with the Truth...the problem has to be with ME!

Suddenly in my mind's eye I remembered different times in recent weeks that the Lord asked me to let go of some insult or injury I was holding onto and how I'd stubbornly resisted what He was saying and hardened my heart to His word because I didn't didn't want to forgive. (I hope none of you are like me!)

I'm not trying to be overly personal here, but the reason I'm telling you this is because over and over again for me, this is where the pedal hits the metal. The temptation to harden my heart doesn't strike me when we're discussing big beautiful realities or when I'm feeling all lovey-dovey towards the body. It hits me when someone hurts me or lets me down...It's then that I want to nurse that wound instead of let it be removed at the Cross; It's then that I want to cling to what I think, instead of letting Him remove how I think by showing me how He thinks.

And though in a way, each of my "No's" seemed kind of small, they must have added up in my heart because there I was days later, in a cloudy place, unable to properly discern the boundary of the Lord and recognize it as His Love for us.

And frankly, that scared me because though my 'rebellions' looked tiny to me, I saw that my unwillingness to hear and obey His voice in the small things had the potential to change my trajectory and cause me to eventually shipwreck.

Anyway, needless to say, the Lord finally had my attention and I continued reading about how God commanded the whole camp to stone the guy for his disobedience to the word of the Lord.

Why everyone, Lord? Why not have just one person run him through with a sword or something? Why ask the whole camp to take him outside the boundaries and stone him?

The more I asked the Lord why it had to be the whole camp, the more I saw the answer seemed to be because there is only One Life that exists in the Land. Israel wasn't a bunch of people. God always saw it as one Son.

You see, this wasn't a judgment between two individual people and what they did or didn't do. This wasn't really about the sticks. It was about the error and presumption of trying to bring another life and reality into God's Land. And therefore to assign a few people to carry out the punishment wouldn't be representative of what was true. It was necessary for the many who shared the One Life to act as One Man and according to One Mind in discovering and exposing and casting out what didn't belong there.

This looks like a story about someone individual's actions, but it seems to speak way beyond the individual, to the matter of the boundaries of Christ and what is -- and what is not-- allowed to live inside of Him.

Then I thought back on Miriam and her leprosy...and all those who died because they grumbled...and various other stories and I realized that all of those troubles and sad stories happened because the Israelites never quite understood what had happened the moment they walked through the door and ate the Passover Lamb. And their lack of understanding was what caused them to continually suppose things were true that weren't, and try to live out from their own ideas, and think it was ok to do something as harmless as carry sticks on the sabbath.

The Lord always looked at them and saw His Son, and they always looked at themselves and saw a bunch of people. And because they were never able to come to comprehend things the way God did, they died in the Wilderness. We may not die literally, but our rebellion and refusal to comprehend and live out from what is True works death in us just the same.

You see, like I said before, it's no good to say you believe things that are true, and then resist the Truth when He speaks it to you.

What I'm trying to say is that if everything we've seen to be true is really true, it has to be true even when it doesn't make sense; even when we don't like it; even when it causes us to feel small or embarrassed....

Truth is hungry and it's always seeking to grow....And eventually the active Truth in us will bring us to the point where we'll have to decide if we're going to give it more room to grow and be established or if we're going to turn away from it. And the thing that makes the difference in what we'll choose is whether or not we have a heart that desires to see what God sees, because it's realized there really is no Plan B.

The boundaries of Christ provide a forgiveness and a covering for unintentional sin, but willful disobedience and rebellion against Truth lands you in a place where you're on your own, outside the camp-- as that man discovered who tried to bring something as innocuous as a pile of sticks into the body of the Lord on the sabbath. He found out that what he considered innocuous and good, since it wasn't Christ, ultimately ended in death.

Thinking so much about stoning reminded me of the woman caught in adultery in John 8, because it says the whole camp picked up stones to stone her to death...Read John 8:1-11.....

And in the light of what I'd just read in Numbers, it seemed to me like stoning her was the totally right thing for Israel to do to someone caught in a sin like that. It was completely normal and expected- they'd done it for thousands of years-- so what was so different this time? Why did they, one by one, feel unable to mete out the judgment the Law required? Why did they put their stones down and walk away?

Again, I'm sure I don't have a corner on understanding this, but when I read it over, I saw that the biggest thing that had changed for them was that this time, in this situation, the Substance of the Law Himself- Jesus- was present...and that changed everything. For many years Israel was the shadow of Christ on earth, but now, the true Light was in the world; the Substance had come. And when the sun is fully shining, shadows are a thing of the past.

I also thought it was interesting that Israel is often pictured as an adulterous wife. Here Israel tosses an adulterous woman before the Lord and asks that He condemn her, just like the Law says...

But what does the Lord do? Does He listen to each of their sides and then say who is right and who is wrong? Does He play favorites or condemn one and praise another?

It says that Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground- the literal version says " the earth"- with his finger, as though he didn't hear their accusations.

And His reaction to them-- or his lack of willingness to be dragged into judging between individuals-- kind of looked like a picture of the complete impartiality of Truth. Truth doesn't take the side of one man against another. Truth just is. Truth doesn't have to defend itself or exert energy deciding between people because Truth sees into the heart of a matter. It turns a deaf ear to all the self-righteous, puffed up claims of flesh. My flesh; your flesh. Truth plays no favorites.

In the light of the Substance, and in the wave of the calm, impartial Truth that was issuing out of the demeanor and mouth of the Lord, God drew a new Line that wasn't between individual people- Jews and Gentiles, sinners and the righteous. It was a line between all flesh and God...The Word Himself had come and things were changing... and the old covenant understanding of the righteousness that came through obeying WORDS was giving way to the new covenant reality of a righteousness that comes by faith; through hearing the Living Word Himself personally speak to a heart.

And the words Jesus spoke "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" said loud and clear: "You're all guilty. No matter what you've done or what you've refrained from doing, the true judgment is between Heaven and Earth. You're all flesh and in need of the same End and the same Cross."

Verse 9 says "Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left standing alone. And the woman was standing in the midst."

Verse 10 "When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "She said, 'No one, Lord.'" And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

In a way, I give that crowd credit. They let Jesus' words into their hearts enough allow the Light of Life to show them that they were no better than she was. For three or so years He'd walked on the earth as the Light of the World -- not as its Judge -- and that's how He revealed Himself to them that day-- as the Light. So when the crowd accusing the woman caught in adultery saw themselves in the Light of Truth, they realized they were just as unrighteous as she was and they deserved to die too. And they dropped their stones.

When the woman caught in adultery saw herself in the Light of Truth, she saw that truly she did deserve to die, but she also saw her accusers were just as guilty as she was! She wasn't worse than everyone else! Which meant she didn't have to walk around carrying a load of condemnation, because the impartial Judgment of God had set her free by revealing that all flesh stands equally guilty in the sight of God!

Jesus said He wasn't interested in condemning her, but it's obvious He didn't expect His pronouncement to be used as license to continue in sin, because He said to her "Go and sin no more." For her, from that moment on, she was being called into an even more narrow kind of freedom that is only found in one place- in Christ...He was calling her to the freedom NOT to sin...

I realize it might be unpopular to say this because we Americans cherish our rights and freedoms, but God's judgment will always and only ever free us to live inside the boundaries of Christ-- never into the freedom to act in opposition to or independently of Him. So the moment we find ourselves thinking and/or living in ways that are contrary to things we've seen to be true in Christ, it's time to take a serious look at the condition of our heart.

The last portion of scripture I want to read with you this morning is Hebrews 3:7-4:1...It's familiar, but it speaks to the importance of not hardening your heart when you hear His voice and of how we need to exhort one another, because sin is deceitful and we're all too willing to listen and believe the things it whispers in our ear.

Those who died in the wilderness died because of unbelief....Because the word they heard wasn't mixed with faith. God gave them lots of chances, but they failed to allow His view of Life and Death and the Land to become their view and so they wandered

until they died, never getting to enjoy the good of the Land they'd been given.

Here's the thing: God can and graciously does speak to our hearts again and again, calling us to agree with His view...And we share the Truth we're seeing with one another, in hopes of helping others see the Truth...And that is all so good and necessary...

But the thing that is appearing so serious to me is that I can't "hear" Christ for you and you can't "hear" Him for me. I can't soften your heart for you and you can't soften your heart for me.

So the decision to hear His voice and not harden our heart is one we each have to make on our own.

Recently Jason said something like "every time find myself looking back to something of the earth, I shake myself and remind myself that there's nothing left there for me. That whole world has been put away by the Cross...it's dead to me and I'm dead to it...and then I keep walking forward into Christ..."

That's my paraphrase, but it was exactly what my heart needed to hear because Plan B's come in all shapes and sizes and I didn't realize it, but being unwilling to agree with what the Cross has done-- even in something small-- reveals that I still think there MUST be a Plan B out there somewhere.

So anyway, those are a few of the things that have been working in my heart recently...I'm seeing that God sharing His mind and life with us is quite a gift, but all too often I treat it so lightly, as to despise it in favor of my own mind and life.

And I'm feeling a greater accountability to the Truth I've seen...that I shouldn't treat it so casually, because if it's true, it's true all the time, not just when it's comfortable or convenient for it to be true.

And lastly, God's gathered us into Christ for a purpose and it's important that we not stop short of where this goes. The Truth makes us free, but it's a freedom that confines us into the vast boundaries of Christ's One Life....

I'm going to finish by reading again Hebrews 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.