

Sermon on Numbers 15:1-21 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Numbers 15:1-21

How you set the table of your life reveals your hope.

(Live to show what's most important to you.)

I love grilling and smoking meat... I have the equipment I do because I grilled a bad meal once (no offense to vegans, but the meatless burgers were too much for my parents!)

So it is all real meat nowadays. I like how it smells and tastes... the time it takes to make something amazing. I am nowhere near as skilled as Kenny, but I end up with some delicious meat.

But the best thing about grilling is actually sharing the meal. Filling the table with family and friends. Pouring a good wine, passing around fresh bread, some bacon-drenched vegetables! (always need out vegetables), and great meat. Along with laughter, stories, fellowship.

In person. Face to face.

[We need to bring back FAR groups to get your guys around a table together!]

This is how we want to do church/discipleship at Reservoir. Our elder meetings are meals, groups often share meals together, and when we gather on Sunday we enjoy a symbolic meal as a family.

There is something about "savoring" that sets us up to savor/enjoy our Savior.

It's supposed to be this way. So much of the story God is telling in Scripture is centered around meals. Poignant. More than just something in the background. Telling the story, modeling how life looks under Yahweh. What relationship with God looks like.

Served up on the tray of Israel's wilderness journey, we see grace, generations, and generosity. It's all a meal with Jesus!

What's happening in the story? We are reading about the journey out of slavery to a place promised by God for his people. In the story we have seen instructions on how to set up the camp, how to worship God, and lessons in trusting him.

In chapters 13 & 14, the people are told to send spies into the land to check it out and see how wonderful it is. It really is, fruitful, amazing. But because there are other nations there, most of the spies are ruled by fear and bring a bad report about the land to the people and they all rebel against God in fear.

They are disciplined with forty years in the wilderness, everyone 20 years or older will miss the promised land - except Joshua and Caleb who had faith for what Yahweh, God called them to.

And immediately from rebellion, God reasserts his promise. He is still bringing his people into the promised land.

Grace

When it comes to sacrifices in Scripture we can sometimes think of them wrongly. We think they are done to earn something...but sacrifices (save one) are typically in response to something received from God.

Hebrews 10:4 “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (ESV)

Sacrifice as response, and we have a perfect example here.

“When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you...”

Rebellion was keeping a generation out but the promise is still on. God is still granting his people unmerited favor by bringing them to a place of abundance. A land with provision... herds, flocks, fields, oil.

This is all future oriented. These sacrifices deal with the future—the time that the children of Israel will be in the land of Canaan.

‘Forty years from now, when you make an offering by fire, do it this way...’

Do you remember “Now and Later” candy? Flavorful now and sticks with you for later!

This grace bolsters the people now, and carries them to the fuller experience of it to come.

God would have been just in disinheriting these people. Of completely starting over. But on the basis of his character, “abounding in steadfast love,” he keep shis promise.

Sacrifice is born out of this grace and how they sacrifice shows God’s desire for his people.

The offerings described in 15:3-16 were not for sin or guilt, but were to be presented as voluntary sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, and fellowship. They were designed to show the Lord how much the people valued his covenant faithfulness and revealed how much he desires relationship with them!

Did you notice it? ‘When you fire the meat, creating a pleasing aroma to the Lord, give him a whole meal!’ For each meat, there was to be bread and wine as well. Depending on how bountiful you were, your cut of meat was bigger, the bigger the loaf and barrel of wine!

These laws are an assurance that their harvests in the land would be abundant, as they stipulate that large quantities must be offered with each animal. *The sacrifice of a lamb must be accompanied by about half a gallon (1.9 liters) of flour, a quart (0.95 liters) of oil, and a quart (0.95 liters) of wine (15:4–5). At least double quantities are needed for a bull (vv. 8–10).*

The sacrifice, to fulfill a vow and the fellowship offering were forms of communion offering, designed to celebrate the relationship with God among the community of faith.

God is giving the people an image of fellowship with him. From grace received, they give back to honor him, to please the Lord, and he doesn’t just want the meat, he desires a whole meal.

Not because he is hungry!

Psalm 50:12–15

[12] “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.
[13] Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?
[14] Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and perform your vows to the Most High,
[15] and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” (ESV)

His presence, through these sacrifices, is pictured as a feast.

He doesn't just want the sandwich, he wants the whole combo meal!

This makes a difference. God wants to dine with you and he will! A whole meal, savored. Painting a picture of what is to come. What his people could expect.

Psalm 23:5–6

[5] You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
[6] Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever. (ESV)

The whole meal is important...

Stacy and I once hosted a couple for dinner in DC. Lovely chicken cordon bleu and delightful bread. But it was kind of an awkward meal and we couldn't figure out why. Later it dawned on us, we forgot the asparagus! The table felt incomplete without the whole meal there. We learned our lesson.

This points to the reality that God desires more than just a part of our lives. He wants us to reflect his grace with all of who we are, with all of our lives. It is fellowship with God.

Desiring fellowship with God above all else is not only the foundation for our obedience. As long as something other than fellowship with God is our chief purpose in life, we will easily be seduced away from obedience.

It is the trouble the people will encounter. But these offerings are designed to invite them back into fellowship.

All of these offerings point forward to an ultimate offering. To a gift of grace for something better than a land. An aroma so pleasing it wins salvation for all who believe.

Have you received this grace? Conveyed in a meal...

Matthew 26:26–28 “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” [27] And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, [28] for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (ESV)

Jesus’ body in our place. His blood extending grace to us, his righteousness, his life. Carries us now, settles our souls in his finished work; and gives us hope for later. That we too will arrive at a place that is our home.

Heading to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. His bride made pure... to feast forever.

Matthew 26:29 “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (ESV)

In the wilderness, hearing “when you come into the land I am giving you” is an injection of grace, of life and hope.

The gospel, too, comes to us as a bold word of grace, that one day we will finish our journey and find ourselves in the new earth with no more striving against sin

or sorrow (Revelation 21). What is more, in the face of difficult circumstances challenging our faith in God's promise, we possess the indwelling Holy Spirit to guarantee that life to come (2 Cor. 5:2),

What God desires is to have the whole meal - my whole life. That we would glorify God and enjoy him forever.

What we keep from him gets in the way of fellowship with him.

“The motivating power of all sin lies in failing to believe God's good purpose for us, which is for us to glorify him and enjoy him forever. Temptation always offers us something: Satan never goes fishing with a bare hook. It doesn't always deliver what it seems to offer, but it always offers something. Yet whatever temptation offers us, it cannot offer us the opportunity to glorify or to enjoy God. Whatever we are pursuing when we sin, it is always something less than God's good purpose for us. It is a functional idolatry of something other than the Lord.”

How we live reveals the grace of Christ. That we are free of the weight of sin, secure in Christ, and we get to go around smelling Like Jesus, a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

What have you been keeping off the table? What are you holding back from Jesus? Habit, hunger, hatred, your heart? He wants it all.

And his grace that gives you all, is for everyone.

Generations

Grace here isn't just for Israel. It's for all that desire to worship God. And this is rooted in an older promise.

Genesis 12:1–3 “Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (ESV)

A blessing to all the families of the earth...

Here, as God tells it, Israel is to live up to that covenant - extending the whole meal outward.

Numbers 15:13–14 “Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way, in offering a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. [14] And if a stranger is sojourning with you, or anyone is living permanently among you, and he wishes to offer a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD, he shall do as you do.” (ESV)

Do as you do. A statute throughout your generations, you and the sojourner shall be alike before the Lord.

We often think of Israel as exclusive, and they sinfully love that way at times. But at the foundation of this people, their setting apart, it has been so all people could experience grace, have relationship with God.

Galatians 3:8–9 “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” [9] So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (ESV)

Because God’s desires are expansive here - wanting more worshipers in the camp - our lives should follow suit.

1 Timothy 2:1–6 “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” (ESV)

Having handled what’s on the table, this is about who is invited!

Jesus used the parable of a banquet to show who the kingdom is for - all who would come.

A statute forever. **Matthew 11:28–30** “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (ESV)

As those who have received grace, how will you extend it to others?

For all of us. From fellowship with Jesus we long for others to experience it too.

This might mean we have friendships with those significantly different from you. With people that might “Christian” differently than you do.. For their good and the glory of God. And it might just remind you of the grace you have been given in Christ.

Reminded in a way that motivates you to give back what you’ve been given.

Generosity

Numbers 15:18–21 “*Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land to which I bring you [19] and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the LORD. [20] Of the first of your dough you shall present a loaf as a contribution; like a contribution from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. [21] Some of the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD as a contribution throughout your generations.*” (ESV)

Some of the first of your dough... Some faithful Jews to this day throw a pinch of flour in the fire when they begin to cook a meal.

From the grace you receive you give back - it reveals where your hope resides.

“By bringing the firstfruits before making use of the rest of the increase themselves, they express respect for God’s sovereignty, as well as the urgent hope that God will bless the continuing productivity of their labor and resources.”

Theology of Work Project

Notice, all this sacrifice is from what the people have been given. “When you get to the fruitful land... When you eat the bread of the land.”

When we talk about generosity we think about money - we are a currency culture - you pay cash for what you buy, you rarely trade. So we should be thinking about money. It's where we reside.

How we handle what we've been given both reveal what our hope is in and it stokes our hope. Just as giving all of your heart to Jesus deepens your relationship with him.

There are no NT requirements for giving (other than it be sacrificial), but asking what is required says more about our heart than it does about God's desires for us.

“What do you have that you did not receive?”

2 Corinthians 9:7–8 “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. [8] And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (ESV)

Here it is a portion of the first dough... a good example.

No privilege is given to those who give more or less but it expresses his purpose in you.

Church is just one place that might receive our generosity, but it is a key place. And the truth is, none of us are giving enough. We should all desire to give more and ask the Lord for the boldness to be generous.

It is generosity that comes only when we realize how generous God has been with us. For Israel it is the land that is proof. For us it is Jesus.

The One who gave it all for us. Making us free to give.

“If we understand the sacrifice of Christ, by which God pays for our forgiveness, then obedience to his law is transformed. No longer is it a burden for us to bear

as slaves; now it is an opportunity for us to serve as sons or daughters, a way for us to experience deeper fellowship with him. If we understand that God's goal for us is to redeem us from an empty way of life and give us the fellowship with him that we were created for, then nothing can be too much for him to ask. God's gift of Jesus proves beyond a shadow of a doubt his care for us and the power of his desire for relationship with us. He so wanted us to be with him for eternity that he died for us on the cross." ID

Oh to receive this grace, pass it on to all generations, and become generous citizens of his kingdom!

Your life is telling a story. **How you set the table of your life reveals your hope.**

May ours show we've been with Jesus, that there is room at the table for the stranger, and there is nothing better than this.