

Numbers 27:1-23

The faithfulness of the Lord is our legacy as we follow Jesus.

What do you want to be remembered for? What achievements? What kind of character?

In December I turned 45 and while that is not necessarily a huge milestone for most people, it was enough of one for me that it sparked questions about the trajectory of the second half of my life.

I found myself spending more time evaluating, my life, and ministry, and thinking through the life of the church. Wondering what metrics map “arrival,” proof that we’ve done enough. What does it feel like to enter the promised land?

I was reminded this week about these questions as the team has been talking about relocation. A new building, a new expression of mission. What will we be remembered for? What will our legacy be?

I found one book tremendously helpful in this quest I continue on.

Ronald Rolheiser, *Sacred Fire*: “The struggle for self-identity and private fulfillment never completely goes away; we are always somewhat haunted by the restlessness of our youth and our own idiosyncratic needs, but the essential default line shifts.”

“Mature Discipleship begins, whether we are explicitly conscious of this or not, when we begin living more for others than for ourselves.”

“Like Jesus, we too are meant to give our lives away in generosity and selflessness, but we are also meant to give our deaths away, not just at the moment of our deaths, but in a whole process of leaving this planet in such a way that our diminishment and death is our final, and perhaps greatest, gift to the world.”

In these two chapters of Numbers we have questions of legacy and life lived for others.

Context: Second census. Men 20 and up - total is just shy of the number they started with in the first chapter of this book. And only two men were counted both times. Joshua and Caleb.

Numbers 26:63–65 “These were those listed by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who listed the people of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho. [64] But

among these there was not one of those listed by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had listed the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. [65] For the LORD had said of them, “They shall die in the wilderness.” Not one of them was left, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.” (ESV)

You will remember these two as the faithful spies who implored the people to go into the Promised Land. Who were confident in God’s favor over Israel.

Sin and rebellion would keep that first generation from entering the land; but this new generation, the promise would be theirs.

The purpose of the census is also different this time around. Rather than to solely map out the fighting force of Israel, this census is to help determine the allotments of the land.

In this census and the demand for justice that follows, we see the legacy of the wilderness journey and the people’s ongoing need for leadership.

Legacy

Legacy: “the long-lasting impact of particular events, actions, etc. that took place in the past, or of a person’s life”

How will the people be remembered? Not so great. Even a generation off, their penchant for idolatry and rebellion against God isn’t positive.

But more than an account of the people’s legacy, this is an account of God’s promise-keeping staying power. Israel is to be defined by God’s performance in the wilderness. He has been faithful.

In the face of the faithlessness of many in the camp, and in our own lives, God’s word still stands and he remains faithful.

Everything he has said comes to pass. His promise is being delivered. His provision has been on display. And here, his faithfulness is expressed in justice.

We meet the daughters of Zelophehad. Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.

The situation arises as the census is completed. Under the old way, inheritance was received by male offspring. Why the census is of men. But here is a whole family, with no son to receive land. No land meant no means for survival and flourishing.

So they boldly approach Moses and Eleazar, and God says they are right.

Numbers 27:6–7 “And the LORD said to Moses, [7] “The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father’s brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them.” (ESV)

Not only was God faithful to bring slaves out of captivity, to bring them to a land of their own, he is faithful to ensure all of his people are provided for - they all have a piece of the inheritance.

From the count of people to extending the provision of land to all the families, this is the legacy of the people - that God is faithful.

We have this in spades in Jesus. Our savior who shares his inheritance with us. Not dependent on our pedigree or performance but his faithfulness.

We live assuming his promises are not for us. We think they are reserved for the superspiritual or well-behaved. But in Christ, the yes is for you.

And this is what defines us. His faithfulness.

The people prove God faithful. The church proves Christ’s faithfulness. May that be what we are remembered for. What we rely upon for all of life, that for the whole wilderness experience of our own journey, we trusted Jesus.

The people setting out forty years before sang of God’s faithfulness, that we might sing as well.

Exodus 15:13 “In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.” (NIV)

Alan Fadling, *A Year of Slowing Down*: “God leads us as his rescued people in love that will never fail. We are on a journey of renewal and restoration. Love restores what it treasures, and God treasures us. God has sought us out in his limitless delight over us. This has always been God’s intention for us. I haven’t the wisdom nor the strength to rescue myself. I couldn’t buy my way out of the slavery in which God has found me... But he chose to rescue me. His love and strength are reliably and always present with me. God leads and guides me with persistent care and wisdom. I am always being treated by God with affection, encouragement, and empowerment.”

It is how his faithfulness works. How his steadfast love is experienced.

And it is bringing us home with him.

God means to prove his faithfulness in you.

What's more, the experience of his faithfulness, love, and care is mediated through leadership.

Leadership

Moses would not enter the promised land but he would see it. But before he was to go up the mountain he prays for the people.

Numbers 27:15–17 “Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, [16] “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation [17] who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.” (ESV)

God tells him to take Joshua, to lay hands on him and commission him before the whole congregation. He won't be exactly like Moses, he will need Eleazar to help indicate God's will.

But he will be the courageous leader the people need to take the land. The warrior shepherd of Israel.

And we haven't lost our need for leadership, like Moses, like Joshua. History is the tale of humanity running after lesser leaders.

But there is One that is raised up above the rest, one greater than Moses who will not leave his people as those without a shepherd.

Though Moses' prayer may have immediate reference to Joshua, this prayer was answered ultimately in Jesus, who was moved with compassion when God's people were harassed and helpless as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

God's faithfulness is most fully seen and experienced in Jesus. The God-man who gave his life that we might find ours.

Hebrews 3:1–3 “Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, [2] who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.

[3] For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.” (ESV)

Our more glorious warrior king, our perfect leader.

“Jesus is both the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the divine warrior (Revelation 19:11-16). As God in human form, Jesus is able to be our perfect King, succeeding where all those before him failed. As the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). Far from using the people to feed his own interests, he gave himself for the sake of his people, for us. As divine warrior, he went out to war on our behalf, confronting the power of Satan and triumphing over him through his death on the cross. As a result, he can now call us, weary and heavyladen as we are, to enter into his rest, the inheritance that he has won for us through his victory on the cross.” ID

We live to follow.

Hebrews 12:1–3 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” (ESV)

As we run we live for the opportunity to introduce Jesus to others, so that they would see our legacy as his faithfulness.

“This is what it means for us to say, “The Lord is my shepherd.” It not only means that we can trust God to supply our daily needs for us — it also means we can trust that God has provided our greatest need for us. He has given a substitute to go out for us and be our champion in the fight against sin. His righteousness and his victory are credited to our account as if they were our own, and the Promised Land of Heaven, which he earned through his faithfulness, has become our inheritance. Because that victory has been won for us, we can now live by faith in that victory, just as Zelophehad’s daughters did, trusting that the inheritance is ours in Christ. We can live confident that nothing can separate us from our final reward, not even death. We can live confident that the Lord will not abandon us to ourselves but will be our shepherd throughout our wilderness wanderings, our guide until the end, and our God forever.” ID

He is leading us home.

The faithfulness of the Lord is our legacy as we follow Jesus.

There is nothing better to be remembered for. Following Jesus, experiencing the faithfulness of God.

May it be so in us.