

Sermon on Number 9:15-10:10 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Numbers 9:15-10:10

Those in Christ are never alone and given a family to wander with.

I don't know if it is a new phenomenon but it is certainly being cataloged and studied in new ways. The current loneliness epidemic.

The UK has a Commission on Loneliness to raise awareness and provide solutions for those feeling lonely. Japan has appointed a Minister of Loneliness, a cabinet level position to tackle the epidemic. People are alone.

A global pandemic didn't help the problem at all. And while some see technology as the savior, it actually deceives us into believing we are connected when we are simply numbed by images and information.

In the U.S., according to a Harvard Graduate School study, "In our recent national survey of American adults, 36% of respondents reported serious loneliness—feeling lonely "frequently" or "almost all the time or all the time" in the four weeks prior to the survey. This included 61% of young people aged 18-25 and 51% of mothers with young children."

Their conclusion: "We need to return to an idea that was central to our founding and is at the heart of many great religious traditions: We have commitments to ourselves, but we also have vital commitments to each other, including to those who are vulnerable."

We are meant for others, for belonging. Even so, we often find ourselves feeling alone.

The human story hasn't changed since the garden. We need others - we need to not be alone.

The people set apart as a witness to the world will wrestle with the same things.

Their leader, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people, will confess to being alone. As a whole they need the steady reminder of the presence of another and their own tribal community.

In fire, cloud, and trumpets we have some savory truth that keeps us as we wander in our own wilderness - it's meant to solve loneliness with hope and presence.

God with Us

The Tabernacle is all set up. Worship has begun there. The camp is ready to set out from Sinai where the commandments had been given, the rules for the road.

We often say or hear others waiting to act on something, that we are waiting for a sign! Israel had their sign! The cloud covering the tent became fire by night.

Tangible, visible presence of God to guide his people.

So much imagery in the tent of meeting points to this reality. God is there. The light of his presence shines on the tribes of Israel.

We read this and think, 'wow! I wish I had a cloud!'

Sadly, prevailing views of God all but eliminate this from our experience.

Early 2000's - *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*.

- People are supposed to be good to each other (i.e., moral)
- The universal purpose of life is being happy and feeling good about oneself.
- There are no absolute moral truths.
- God allows "good people" into Heaven.
- Belief in a God who remains distant from people's lives.

A God that is far off and aloof. Easier to criticize and diminish an absent, uninterested God.

But how He has revealed himself, to Israel here, and in his word, shows that He is present, interested and involved.

The cloud and fire point prove his presence in the wilderness. The people only had to look up to see. To trust his guidance. That he hasn't abandoned them.

But it also points to something better. To physical presence.

Isaiah 7:14 "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (ESV)

Jesus - God with us.

He is the cloud and fire. Not just for his public ministry, for the cross and resurrection. But for all time. No longer hovering above the tent - he has moved into new temples - you and me.

We think we need a new tent, a better space to experience God's presence.

"Sacred space is the beginning of the re-sacralizing of creation, despoiled by our sin. Yet in the Gospel, we don't make a pilgrimage to a holy place to find God; God makes a pilgrimage to a ruin to find us & turns us into a holy place. You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit." - David Cassidy

Dynamite to loneliness. You never walk alone. Even when we fail to see, to be aware of his presence, he is faithful to remain near - "abiding there" with us.

Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." (ESV)

What is said to Israel in the wilderness is said to us in ours..

Hebrews 13:5-6 "...be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." [6] So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (ESV)

I am familiar with people who don't want to be alone... Ewen shower. Uncovering something foundational in us.

A deep need met most deeply by the presence of Jesus. Oh that we would know it!

It's the guidance Israel needs. It is what we need to make it on our journey. The grace of his presence.

“In the New Testament, the apostles continually remind us that our journey in sanctification through the wilderness of this age is by the ongoing grace of God—the same grace that first delivered us through the new exodus from the slavery of sin.”

“Peace, the absence of condemnation, the experience of God’s favor — these things are only to be found by pleading the righteousness of Jesus Christ in our place. If our hope is resting on the righteousness of Christ, then we have the favor of God and the presence of God with us right now.” ID

Presence that promotes obedience.

Numbers 9:23 “At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out. They kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses.” (ESV)

See and follow.

Numbers 10:3 “And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” (ESV)

Hear and obey. Called to action.

John 14:15–16 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. [16] And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,” (ESV)

Helped by his presence to obey. Prompted by the Spirit. Anchored in the word. We have what we need to live in response to his rescue.

Scripture is both where we receive our marching orders and where we are reminded what we are marching toward.

This week as we were heading out to school, I turned the windshield wipers on and Adia said “Dad, you know the road, you don’t need your wipers!” I told her I know the road but I still need to see it!

Maybe we need to repent of knowing the way and neglecting it...

Theology for Life—We, who by God’s grace know Jesus as Lord and Savior, have great motivation to obey him, for God has given us both his Word and his Spirit’s presence to guide us in his will.

And our obedience to his way also serves as a reminder before the Lord.

“blowing the trumpets was more than just a way of summoning the people to come to the tabernacle or to follow the cloud; it was a kind of prayer, a plea to God to remember his people and their needs, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God (v. 9; cf. v. 10).”

While their enemies are strong, it is the Lord himself, symbolized by the ark, who goes before Israel, scattering his and their enemies (vv. 35–36). God provides whatever victory comes.

We have this in spades with Jesus.

Hebrews 7:25 “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (ESV)

As trumpets before the throne...

For the church’s gospel marching orders, we too have the promise of Christ’s triumphant presence (Matt. 28:16–20) along with the assurance that he will subdue all of his and our enemies (Rom. 16:20).

Matthew 28:18–20 “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

Romans 16:20 “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (ESV)

In Christ you are not alone. You are the temple of his dwelling - live accordingly!

This is great news. But there is more...

Us with God

Cloud and fire, silver trumpets. They are markers for the people... for the whole congregation. There is an “us” in this story.

This wilderness journey is not supposed to be a solitary endeavor. God doesn’t hand out maps to individuals and say “see you on the other side!” No, He leads the nation - the congregation - together.

We are made for others. Even in the midst of God’s presence he gives us a people.

Here organized in tribes, this is how they worship and go to war.

“After the journey through the wilderness was over and the people had entered the Promised Land, these trumpets were still regularly to be used for two events: warfare and worship. They were to be sounded whenever the people went into battle (10:9) and whenever they gathered for their festivals (10:10). At the sound of the trumpet, the community would gather together either to fight or to fellowship in praise. The trumpets would issue a continuing call to exercise obedience to God’s demands.” ID

A model of how we worship and wage spiritual war, with others.

“Often we try to face our struggles on our own. We live after all in a culture that cherishes individualism. Yet we are to be a community of believers, a family of God’s people, a military unit that fights together and is committed to the policy, “No man left behind.” When one person hurts, we all hurt; when one person rejoices, we all rejoice.” ID

Now, we want to see the value of breaks, solitude, being alone - grace for the introvert! But these moments are not meant to be our abiding posture. Recognize you can't thrive that way, you are made for community.

Heroes are never alone. The Lone Ranger has Tonto; Batman has Robin; Mando has Grogu. Every Avenger is better with a team...

Simple recognition of what works best and what we were made for.

Comes with a cost. Obedience always does.

- Sacrifice
- Participation
- Availability

In an age full of demands on our time and presence we thrive when we live having seen the cloud and fire's call to community.

Hebrews 10:23–25 “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (ESV)

We all need to find a context in which we come together with other believers to build deep and strong relationships. We need to make a space in our life where we encourage them and they are able to encourage us in our daily warfare.

All on purpose - made ambassadors of Jesus together. Honest, reliable, hungry for Jesus.

“When we live our lives in isolation, what we have is unavailable and what we lack is unprocurable,” wrote Basil (an early Church father). When we live our lives independently, other people are poorer because they cannot benefit from our gifts: “what we have is unavailable.” Also, when we isolate ourselves, we are poorer because the benefits of others’ gifts are lost to us, so what we lack, we cannot get. There are good things in others that are “unprocurable” unless we interact with them.” Arthur Lindesly

Where we learn we are not alone... hearing from a brother or sister, sharing the same challenges as you... running to Jesus for the same help as you. I love hearing reports of this happening in Reservoir!

More than acquaintances, more than “friends” in a casual sense. Spiritual friendship where you worship together and do battle together.

Community is where renewal happens.

Reshaped into family so others will see.

1 Peter 2:9–10 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (ESV)

Stronger together.

We might read Numbers 9 and 10 and wish we had a cloud...

We have a cloud... a cloud of witnesses! Brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hebrews 12:1–2 “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.” (ESV)

Looking to Jesus... together.

That your wilderness would be merely aimless wandering but surrounded by saints struggling like you, reminding you of Jesus’ presence. A people living in WONDER together before the glory of God.

Those in Christ are never alone and given a family to wonder with.

“One day the final trumpet will sound, announcing the definitive arrival of God’s presence on earth (1 Corinthians 15:52). This time it will not be in the form of a fiery pillar or as a baby at Bethlehem, but in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ to establish the new heavens and the new earth. The final trumpet will sound, and the dead in Christ will rise, and those believers who are still alive will be caught up into his presence (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Then our wandering and our warfare will finally be over, replaced forever by worship.” ID

God is with you - Come to Christ, repent and ask to be made his dwelling place. It’s what your soul has ached for. Freely given.

Be reminded God is with us, always.

Walk with others - You can go fast alone, but you go far together. Obedient to Christ. Give your people more of you. Honest, reliant on the Spirit, for the glory of God and our good.

You never walk alone. It’s the best life, and we get to live it together.

Let’s go!