

3. Dedication and celebration

October 27, 2011

Someday, after everything is said and done, and if the Lord carries His return, we will have our own church building here in this property. We won't have to move in and out anymore. The box church will be a thing of the past. All the equipment will be waiting for us when we walk into the building following Thursday and Sunday. Then, we will have a special service as a dedication to the Lord for His mercy, kindness and goodness, as well as a celebration for His grace and patience with us. I am anxiously waiting for that day. It will be a new beginning of our church.

That is what was happening to the Israelites in the wilderness. They were excited that they escaped from the iron grip of the Egyptian slave task masters, but they were facing a new challenge – forming a godly nation according to God's way.

To make them be the people of a godly nation, the Lord had to teach them everything from the beginning.

A. KEEP IT CLEAN

Numbers 5:1-4 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. 3 You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell." 4 And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.

Other than my experience in the military, I have not done much outdoor camping. It just is not my style. I'd prefer my own bed and pillow, hot shower, hi-speed internet access, and all the comfort of city living. You can say that I am a pathetically hopeless city slicker. And I am proud of it.

Can you imagine traveling in the desert for two years without returning to your home? To them, the wilderness Sinai desert was their home. In addition to that, they carried over some of the diseases from Egypt. One of the most serious diseases during their time was leprosy. There was no cure for that disease at that time without God. Since God's holy presence was in the midst of Israel camp, thus the camp should be pure and holy in His sight.

The Lord ordered them to separate lepers from the rest for two reasons:

1) Leprosy was very contagious.

If a leper was cured, he had to go through a lengthy process of cleansing before being admitted back into the camp.

2) Leprosy represents people's sin and defilement against His holiness.

The Lord wanted Israel to learn about separating themselves from defilement and maintaining holiness for the Lord. They were heading into the territory that was surrounded by the carnal and immoral nations.

This applies to us as well. By obeying God's Word in every area of our life, we can cleanse ourselves from all filthiness that comes from the world and our built-in carnal nature.

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

B. CONFESSION AND RESTITUTION

Numbers 5:5-10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 6 "Speak to the children of Israel: 'When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the Lord, and that person is guilty, 7 then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged. 8 But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong must go to the Lord for the priest, in addition to the ram of the atonement with which atonement is made for him. 9 Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his. 10 And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his.'"

The Israelites were heading to the enemy territory. The last thing they needed was disunity within the camp due to sin and unforgiveness with one another.

This applies to us as well. It is so important for us to deal with our sin against our own spiritual brothers and sisters by asking for forgiveness. People would say, "That is so humbling." Yes, that is the precise point.

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

To confess means "to speak the same; to agree with; to admit the truth." When the people confessed to God, they were not telling Him anything He did not already know. But their confession was a demonstration of a change of heart. In other words, confession is agreeing with God about our sin. Refusing to confess their sins allowed sin to take deeper root within their lives and community. It gives a great foothold to the devil to get in.

Admitting our sin unlocks the gate so that we can have forgiveness, joy, and peace. If we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive.

C. THE LAW OF NAZIRITE

Numbers 6:1-8 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord, 3 he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. 4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin. 5 All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. 6 All the days that he separates himself to the Lord he shall not go near a dead body. 7 He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. 8 All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the Lord.

Let's clarify the difference between "Nazirite" and "Nazarene." Jesus was called a "Nazarene" because He came from Nazareth, a city despised by the people of Judea. The word "Nazirite" comes from a Hebrew word that means "to set apart, to dedicate." Jesus was not a Nazirite because He touched dead bodies and drank the fruit of the vine, both of which were forbidden to Nazirites.

Nazirites were Jewish men or women who dedicated themselves wholly to the Lord to fulfill the Nazirite vow of total separation for a certain length of time. The Nazirite vow required being devoted to God. At the same time, it demanded to be abstaining from things God did not allow. Each Nazirite had a different goal in mind, but all of them wanted to glorify the Lord and obey His Word. They didn't isolate themselves from society like the Medieval monks did but rather were witnesses to others of the importance of total devotion to the Lord.

Three responsibilities were involved in the Nazirite vow:

- 1) They were not to drink wine, grape juice, vinegar, or fermented drinks, nor were they allowed to eat grapes, raisins, or even the skins and seeds of grapes.
- 2) They had to let their hair grow as a sign they were devoted especially to God.
- 3) They were never to touch a corpse, even that of a family member or close relative.

We know one Nazirite well – Samson. His Nazirite vow was not a short period, rather he was designated to be a Nazirite before he was conceived according to Judges 13.

Judges 13:7 And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'

But Samson violated his vow and didn't maintain his commitment to the Lord which caused his downfall.

Many people think that the secret of Samson's strength was in his long hair. No, it was his commitment to the Lord. The Lord extended His mercy to Samson for the sake of Israel for twenty years while he was their Judge. I find one of the saddest verses in the Bible in Judges 16:

Judges 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

He was so far gone away from following the Lord that he didn't even know that the Lord had departed from him. May none of us ever come to that point.

D. THE PRIESTLY BLESSING

Numbers 6:22-26 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: 24 "The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; 26 The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.'"

In my opinion, this is one of the most beautifully expressed blessings written in the Bible. It just drips with God's goodness and love for us.

To have the glorious, happy face of God shining upon man is the greatest gift one could have. To know that as God looks upon you, He is well pleased – not because of who you are, or what you have done, but because you are in Jesus Christ – there is no greater source of peace and power in life.

E. ARRANGEMENT OF LAMPS

Numbers 8:1-4 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to Aaron, and say to him, 'When you arrange the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in

front of the lampstand.” 3 And Aaron did so; he arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand, as the Lord commanded Moses. 4 Now this workmanship of the lampstand was hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it was hammered work. According to the pattern which the Lord had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.

The tabernacle was divided into two parts: the holy of holies where God’s glory rested above the Ark of Covenant, a.k.a. the Mercy Seat, and the holy place which was separated from the holy of holies by the veil. There were three pieces of furniture in the holy place: the Table for the twelve loaves of Showbread, the golden Altar of Incense before the veil, and the golden Lampstand with its seven Lamps.

There were no windows in the Holy Place, the only light source was the golden Lampstand. What did this Lampstand symbolize? Since the tabernacle, its furnishings, and its service all speak of the person, character, and work of Jesus Christ according to Hebrews 9, the Lampstand surely symbolize Jesus as the Light of the world.

This brings an important point to us. Though Jesus Himself is the Light of the world, He commands us to be light and salt in this world.

Matthew 5:13-14 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

How can we be the light of this world without the Source of the light? We cannot. As the Lampstand needs the oil to bring forth light, so do we need the Holy Spirit to bring forth the Light of the world Jesus Christ to the unbelieving people around us. The Spirit of God alone can empower us to witness effectively for Christ.

F. WHEREVER GOD GOES, WE GO

Numbers 9:15-17 Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. 16 So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. 17 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents.

This miraculous pillar first appeared at the Exodus and it remained with Israel throughout their journey until they entered into the Promised Land. When the Israelites set up camp because the pillar stopped moving, it hovered over the tabernacle at the center of the camp, reminding the people day and night that their God dwelled with them. It must have been an awesome sight!

Please note that the movements of the pillar were ordered by the Lord. He didn’t ask for the counsel of the leaders or the people, nor were the people of God able to predict what God would do next. The pillar might linger overnight and then move in the morning, or it might stay two days, a month, or even a year. But no matter when the pillar moved, by day or by night, the Jews had to be ready to pack up and follow.

It’s interesting to note that this miraculous pillar brought light to the people of Israel but darkness to their enemies as it was mentioned in Exodus 14. In this respect, it symbolizes the Word of God, because those who don’t know Christ by faith simply

can't understand what the Word is saying. In order to know the mind of God, we must submit to the will of God, and the first step is to put saving faith in Jesus Christ. Then you move out of darkness and into God's wonderful light.

The priests and Levites, who lived near the tabernacle, probably assigned people to keep watch day and night so they would know when the pillar was moving. If we sincerely want to do the will of God, we must keep our eyes open and be alert at all times and continuously wait upon the Lord. The New Testament word for this attitude of alertness and expectancy is "watch". Matthew 24:42; 25:13; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 1 Peter 4:7.

Jesus called Himself "the Light of the world" in John 8, and He promised those who followed trusted Him that they would never walk in darkness. It's a great privilege to "walk in the light" and enjoy fellowship with God and God's people. To walk in darkness means to be out of the will of God, apart from the blessing of God, and in danger of the discipline of God.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We cannot keep ourselves holy apart from God. The only way we can stay holy is obeying His Word in every area of our life.
- 2) Confession is agreeing with God about our sin.
- 3) Wherever the Lord leads us, it is the best place for us to be though we may not understand at that time.