

Hold on to your inheritance

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Paulus, for that excellent reading.

And a good morning to all of you. Let me just extend a warm welcome again to all of you. And if you are a visitor this morning and you don't know me, my name is Brian and I serve as the pastor of this church.

Let me just draw your attention to the fact that there was a newcomer's corner as well over that side, which you can visit after the service if you wanted to know more about our church and to connect with us.

And especially if you're a visitor this morning, what you might not know is that for the last three months, we've actually been journeying through an often neglected book of the Old Testament, the book of Numbers.

You might remember that in the very first sermon of this series, back on June 9th, I mentioned that we might have a number of misconceptions about the book, and I asked you three months ago to keep an open mind.

[1 : 0 7] And today, here we are, about to hear the very last sermon of this series. And I trust that the journey that we've been on has been much more enlightening and thought-provoking than perhaps you might have expected.

I've learned quite a bit and been challenged a lot myself. And also the sense that I get from talking to some of you is that the middle portion of Numbers in particular, Numbers 19 to 25, really made an impression on you, and I'm very glad to hear that.

Now, last week, we as a congregation, we were also, I asked you to reflect a little bit on what you learned from the book of Numbers. I'm very sorry that there was a little bit of a miscommunication.

The ushers last week were supposed to pick up all your reflections after you wrote them. But I think that was not communicated from up front. But thankfully, some of you still got your reflections to Yili, our administrator.

So I do have a few of them. And if you still want to hand them in to me or to Yili, that's perfectly fine. I'll be very happy to hear what your reflections on the book of Numbers are.

[2 : 1 3] But what we're going to do now, before we start, is I'm going to read a few that did come in. And I put them on the PowerPoint as well. And some of them are abbreviated slightly due to space.

So here are some of the things that people mentioned regarding what they've learned. I now realize the extent of Israel's sin. Even Moses strikes the rock and rebelled against God.

The depth of Israel's repeated sin. Fear despite seeing signs and wonders. Ungratefulness despite rescue from slavery. Rebellion.

And that constant entanglement in sin is actually reflecting us. The true indicators of spiritual health. When we realize how dangerous and destructive sin is.

And resolve to be zealous for the Lord. But that just shows how much we need to be real about our sin. And how much we need our Savior. So those are some of the things that people were reminded of.

[3 : 19] Learn about, sorry. And here are some things that people were reminded of. And I'm very glad that the big team of numbers came through very clearly. So this is what some people wrote. God's holiness and faithfulness to his promises and his people.

God's faithfulness to us reaches the skies. And God's unconditional faithfulness despite my unfaithfulness. God will lead his people home.

God is holy and does not leave sin unpunished. So the big team of numbers comes through very clearly. And how have we been challenged to act? Some people wrote this.

To actively remember what the Lord has done for me. While looking to our eternal home and hope. Somebody wrote this from Numbers 25. Balaam succeeded in tempting Israel to sin.

And setting God against Israel. Our worst enemy is ourselves and our sin. But praise the Lord. Jesus meets our deepest need. And deals with our sin.

[4 : 22] From the very first sermon. Count me in. I remember to make my life count. Signing up for a larger purpose. And being committed to the way of life.

In the Lord's army. One more reflection. To be merciful to those who fall. And for concluding reflections. Well let me just quote a slightly longer one.

This is what someone wrote. I've learned so much through this series. Not just in understanding better an Old Testament book. But who God is. Who we are. And how it points to Christ.

And our need for a saviour. Each week I've come away with a renewed appreciation. Of what God has done for us through Christ. Especially in the light of how great our sin is.

And yet God is so gracious and faithful. To make atonement through Christ. Although we deserve his judgment. And this is from the very first sermon.

[5 : 23] Only one life. It will soon be passed. Only what's done. For Christ will last. So thanks very much again. For contributing some of your reflections.

And for allowing me to share it. With the congregation at large. Well let's pray. And then let's get into the final sermon. Of this series. Heavenly Father thank you that you have never abandoned us.

You could have just let humanity wander off. Into the eternal wilderness. After we sin against you in Eden. And yet you compassionately clothed Adam and Eve. And promised them a serpent crusher.

You could have chosen not to start again. After the whole world turned against you during Noah's day. But you chose renewal instead. You could have turned away from the arrogance of man after Babel.

But you promised Abraham that from his line. Blessing will override the curse of sin. And thank you for showing us through this journey in the book of Numbers.

[6 : 27] How great our sin is. And therefore how much greater our saviour is. Thank you for your faithfulness in the midst of our fickleness. Thank you that you are the pillar of fire.

Leading us to our true home. And so as we get ready to hear from you one more time from the book of Numbers. Please speak to us again through your living and active word. And work in our hearts by your spirit.

That all who are weary will find rest. And all who are complacent will strive to enter your rest. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Well what a journey it has been, hasn't it? This ancient book has felt surprisingly contemporary. As it works through our ups and downs as God's people.

Speaking to us on things like our inclination to fear. Our propensity to grumble. And how easily we get entangled in sin. And so when we get to Numbers chapter 36.

[7 : 29] Well I don't know about you but it all feels rather anticlimactic doesn't it? After talking donkeys. And fierce battles. To draw the book to a close.

By looking at a piece of legislation. Seems like a rather tedious way to end. Maybe one or two of our lawyers might be interested in matters of Israelite inheritance law.

But for the rest of us it's hard to see what this has got to do with us today. But as I hope you've learned by now. That's not how this book works. God still speaks today through his ancient word.

As one more reflection says. I used to see Numbers as a history of Israel. But I now see it as relevant to my life's journey through the wilderness of our lives.

For you see don't forget. Chapter 36 is the end of the book of Numbers. But it is not the end of the story as a whole.

[8 : 32] Israel hasn't actually reached the end of their journey. The land that God has promised to give to his people have yet to be possessed. Joshua has been appointed as Moses' successor.

But he has yet to lead his people into the land. And so Numbers 36 is more like a rest stop on the highway.

Rather than journey's end. It's like the Laban Rata rest house. About two-thirds up Mount Kinabalu. Where you stop. Get some food.

Get some sleep. Before you go all the way to the top. Or as one climber puts it. It's where you get the necessary energy required. Before you make the final summit attack.

And isn't that where we are? We are on the way to our true home. The summit of our true existence. But we're not there yet. And when we are well into our journey.

[9 : 30] We get tired. We need energy. We need renewed motivation. We need recharging. So that we'll keep moving. And climbing. And that's what Numbers 36 is.

It's where you're going to get your fresh energy to keep on moving along. How so? Well, if you come with me to Numbers 36.

I want you to notice what their issue is. It's all about inheritance. By my count, the word inherit or inheritance comes up 14 times in Chapters 36 in the NIV.

More specifically, these ladies, the daughters of Zelophehad, are looking to hold on to their inheritance.

As we will see in a moment. And again, isn't that what every Christian is called to? We are to hold on to our inheritance.

[10 : 28] For these daughters, it's their inheritance in the land. And for us, it's our inheritance in God's eternal home.

As Hebrews 9 verse 15 puts it, For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

And yet, we know that holding on to our inheritance is no easy task. When I was in my 20s, I was told not to be surprised if 10 years later, there would be people whom I know who used to follow Christ, but no longer.

That felt like a rather abstract warning then. Not anymore. For here I am in my 30s. And I feel that keenly.

Some of my friends are now far from the Lord. And not necessarily the one that I would have expected to drift away. They didn't hold on to their inheritance, at least not at the moment.

[11 : 37] In recent months, some of us might have read on the internet of some high-profile Christian authors and songwriters who have declared they are no longer in the faith. And so that raises the question, Given this reality, how are we to hold on to our inheritance?

Well, the daughters of Zelophehad will give us an answer. Now, notice how the Book of Numbers tells us to pay attention to them. Now, where do we hear about them?

They are there in Numbers 36, but they are also there right at the beginning of Numbers 27. You see, you need Chapter 27 to make sense of Chapter 36.

And where they are mentioned is important. You see, Numbers 26 to 36 marks a new section in the Book of Numbers. Because Numbers 26 to 36 is all about the new generation.

And it's significant that the first story and the last story about the new generation are about Zelophehad's daughters. It's as if the writer is drawing our attention to them to say, Hey, look, you want to know how the new generation should be like?

[12 : 59] In a nutshell? Well, look at who I begin with and who I end with. Zelophehad's daughters. And in both passages, notice how they treat their inheritance.

And so that's why we are going to look at both Numbers 27, verse 1 to 11, and then Numbers 36, because they actually go together. And these daughters will show us two ways we are to hold on to our inheritance.

And so firstly, hold on to our inheritance by having a spirit of repentance and faith. By having a spirit of repentance and faith.

Now come with me to Numbers 27, but just before we go in, to understand the exact issue being brought up in this chapter, we need to know how inheritance works during that time.

You see, this is how it works. Once God's people have settled in the promised land, the land was supposed to be divided amongst the tribes, apart from the Levites. Land was passed down through sons, and property was divided amongst them.

[14 : 14] Now daughters, on the other hand, did not have a share in the family estate. Instead, they usually received a substantial dowry from their fathers when they got married.

So if your dad was rich, well, good for you. You could get plenty of money and jewelry. And if you're a girl, once you got married, you become a member of your husband's family, and your sons inherited the land.

And so that way, land was kept within the family. And one more thing just to point out also is that the family name and the inheritance goes together.

You can't have one without the other. But wait a minute. What if there are no sons? If the father died and there were no sons, well, the land would instead go to the brother, or if no brothers, to the nearest male relative.

And as a result, if that happens, the father's name would die out, his name forgotten. And that was exactly the issue Zelophehad's daughters were raising.

[15 : 24] Just look at 27 verse 4. Why should our father's name disappear from his clan? Because he had no son. And without the inheritance, not only is their father's name forgotten, their livelihood is threatened.

Now, because I'm a city boy, I don't see this clearly. Because to me, when I read chapter 27, I might think, why these daughters make such a big deal? If no land, okay lah, just accept it.

You're going to get a dowry, right? If you get married. Because my connection to the land is not strong at all. But I know that there are a number of you in this congregation who, because of your background, you understand full well the importance of land to your family's well-being.

You better understand than me where these daughters are coming from. Because you know that land is a big deal in an agrarian society. That's where they're coming from.

For the Israelites, land and life go together. Because it's where you plant your crops. It's where you get your food.

[16 : 36] It's where you live. And so to not have any land as a single woman, it's a bleak situation indeed. How will you begin to provide for yourself?

It's not like you can start an e-business selling clothes online. And what if you couldn't get married for whatever reason? How will you survive?

So what are they going to do? Well, let's have a look. In 27 verse 1 to 2, these daughters boldly approach Moses and the leaders.

And in verse 4, they make a bold request. Give us property among our father's relatives. Give us our inheritance.

A bold request indeed. However, boldness isn't the same as arrogance. Just look at how they describe your father in verse 3.

[17 : 37] They said, Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah's followers who banded together against the Lord, but he died for his own sin and left no sons.

Now notice, they don't try to talk up their father. They acknowledge he has sinned. And they accept he rightly died for his own sin.

He was part of the rebellious wilderness generation. Now just imagine yourself in their shoes. You're here before Moses in part because you want to protect and preserve the family name.

That's why you're asking for the inheritance. But surely, the instinctive thing to do is to ensure that there's no mud on that name, isn't it? You would try to avoid or at least downplay the bad aspects of what your father has done.

But that's not what they do. Rather, they begin by showing repentant realism. Their boldness is a humble one. They own the wrong of their father.

[18 : 48] They recognize he had died for his own sin. And they don't try to shift the blame on others. Their statement about their father following Korah is a matter of fact, not a matter of blame.

And indeed, they show a keen understanding overall that although their father and Korah went against God in different ways, well, both deserve their punishment.

So all throughout, the daughters do not dispute the Lord's justice in this matter. Rather, they seem to be implicitly saying, Lord, we understand why the previous generation perished.

We've been paying attention. We don't deny what you did is right and just. And so these daughters are showing repentant realism in the manner that they make their requests.

But they're also showing something else. They're showing feisty faith. Think about it. Now, remember, at this point in time, not a single piece of the promised land has been possessed by the Israelites.

[20 : 03] And yet, here are these daughters marching up to Moses and talking about inheritance, about claiming their inheritance as if Israel is already in Canaan.

You see, what does that tell us about them? That tells us that they have unshakable faith that God will keep his promise. But more than that, they're also showing absolute trust that the one who makes this promise is absolutely righteous.

You see, they saw that the descendants of Korah, despite his high-handed rebellion, had not perished. According to 26 verse 11, his line had not died out.

And they were confident that their father, although a sinner, was not like Korah. That's the point they made to Moses. And so, if Korah's name didn't disappear, but still lived through his sons, well, why should Zelophehad's name not live through his daughters via their share in the land.

Do you see that? See, the only thing that was keeping them from receiving their inheritance at the moment was their gender. There was no moral or theological reason to deny them their claim.

[21 : 34] And so, they put forth their case. They appeal to God's justice. They make their claim based on God's righteous character. God's promises.

And so, these daughters are showing feisty faith. They believe that God keeps his promises and that God is true to his character. And so, as a result, verses 5 to 11 tell us Moses brings it to the Lord and God agrees with them.

Look at verse 7. The Lord said, what Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and give their father's inheritance to them.

And not only that, the Lord decides to lay down a legal precedent. If no son, he says, then he goes to the daughter. If no daughter, it goes to the brothers. If no brothers, then it goes to the uncles on the father's side.

And if no such uncles, then it goes to the nearest relative in the clan. So there's proper order now. But here's the big point. As a result of their repentant stance and their feisty faith, the women held on to their inheritance.

[22 : 56] That's the big point. It's not so much about women's rights. Now, that doesn't mean that this passage has nothing to say to 21st century concerns about gender equality and so on.

But because we know that that's one of the big concerns of today's world, it's very tempting to read this passage through a 21st century lens and see it as being primarily or even exclusively about the rights of women.

So we might say, oh, look at Zellofi Hart's daughters fighting for their rights. Well, so should we? Isn't that the application? Now, certainly this passage does demonstrate a high view of women.

It shows that women cannot be denied access to God and his promises simply because of their gender. It shows a deep concern for the women's welfare to be looked after and not be neglected.

It reveals that laws that resonate with Christian teaching and promote justice, especially where women are being denied justice, are certainly ones that Christians should champion, definitely.

[24 : 12] But in all this, what the passage wants to highlight is not so much the demand of the daughters for equal rights, but the faith of these daughters that their God is righteous.

God is righteous.

They saw their inheritance as God's gift, and so they held to it tenaciously by making this bold request. And so they foreshadowed the Christian's attitude, who should similarly see our inheritance, won by the gospel of Jesus Christ, as God's gift.

And like any gift we value, we should gratefully hold on to it as much as we can by showing repentance and faith every single day.

And of course, part of walking with Jesus in repentance and faith would be following his example in how he treated women with great dignity, compassion, and love.

[25 : 33] But see that as something that flows out of the gospel, not something we put in place of the gospel. Numbers 27 points first of all to faith in God, which then has implications for how we treat women, rather than pointing directly to a specific feminist agenda.

And so here's the challenge of Numbers 27 to men and women alike. To our sisters, do you have the faith of these daughters?

Notice how different they are from the men of Korah and the daughters of Moab that we read earlier in the book of Numbers. Those people doubted God and acted as stumbling blocks.

But no, these daughters held on to God's promises and showed absolute trust in His character. And so sisters, are you exhibiting such faith wherever you are?

What would that look like? That call to walk in faith would look a little bit different from person to person. If you are single or a retiree, you might have a little bit more flexibility in your time.

[26 : 50] And so how can you use your flexibility to live as if Christ is your greatest inheritance? Whose life can you invest in to show them Christ?

If you are a mother, what does that look like for you? Perhaps to display faith means simply to see all those endless physical tasks that you have to do as ways of serving Christ by serving your kids.

Knowing that your efforts might be the way that they one day too might know Jesus for himself, might inherit him, and serve him joyfully.

How can you display the faith of these daughters? And to our brothers, how are you encouraging your sisters to have the faith of these daughters? The best way, of course, is to set the example by displaying such faith yourselves.

like Moses, are you quick to turn to the Lord before making decisions as he did here? Or are you making decisions without even thinking about God?

[28 : 00] Well, how do you show your faith in action? So hold on to your inheritance by having a spirit of repentance and faith.

Walk daily in that faith. But that's not the end of the story just yet. For just when we thought that we had left these daughters behind, well, up they pop again in the final chapter of Numbers.

And so what does Numbers 36 add to the picture? Well, that brings us to the second way. We should hold on to our inheritance. And so secondly, hold on to our inheritance by staying intentional and wholehearted.

By staying intentional and wholehearted. Now, once again, in this chapter, Moses is approached, as at this time by the family heads. In verse 2, they recall what happened in Numbers 27, but now they bring up a loophole.

Verse 3. They said, Now, suppose these daughters marry men from other Israelite tribes. Then their inheritance will be taken from our ancestral inheritance and added to that of the tribe they marry into.

[29 : 20] And so part of the inheritance allotted to us will be taken away. When the year of Jubilee for the Israelites come, their inheritance will be added to that of the tribe into which they marry, and their property will be taken from the tribal inheritance of our ancestors.

And so what's happening is this. If these daughters married into another tribe, well, their land inheritance will go over to the tribe of their husband. Now, there are two problems with this.

The first problem is it breaks up the geographical unity of the land. So imagine, for example, if Syrian was owned by Singapore, and then Simunjan was owned by the Philippines, and then Seratok was owned by some Javanese, and so on, well, the promised land of Sarawak will be all chopped up into bits within it.

And this is a problem because, remember, Israel is an agrarian society. So if your pieces of land are all over the place, you can't look after all of them well.

You know, how are you going to look after your farm in Lawas when you're in Guching, and by the way, Asia doesn't exist. And so you will necessarily neglect some pieces of your land.

[30 : 37] And even the year of Jubilee, where land could be returned to its original owner after 50 years, offers no protection here because it only applies to purchase property, not inherited property.

So that's the first problem, problem, but the second problem is even more serious. You know, if this keeps happening, what's going to happen to the tribe's land? Well, their land is reduced, and eventually you could even end up losing all your ancestral inheritance.

And so it's serious business. And the family heads recognize this. And so they bring the matter to Moses, who consults the Lord, and God once again provides a solution.

He says in verse 6, the daughters of Zelophehad can only marry within their own tribal clan. And so that would help ensure that all the tribes kept the land that the Lord had given them, and that would preserve the inheritance of all his people.

And the daughters obey, and the crisis is averted. So what do we learn from all this? Well, first of all, notice the foresight exhibited by the elders.

[32 : 09] Now, they had obviously studied the matter, and they caught the loophole before it actually happened. They valued their inheritance enough to be intentional in how they stewarded their inheritance.

they exercised discernment and prudence. And so they taught very carefully about how they lived, what the future was going to hold, and they saw that although the step of marrying men from other tribes is not wrong in itself, there's nothing wrong with that, it could lead to problems down the road.

And of course, in the worst-case scenario, it could even lead to them losing their inheritance. inheritance. And because they noticed that, they took the necessary steps.

And so that's one lesson to draw out. What about us? How intentional are we about living our Christian lives in such a way to ensure that we hold on to our inheritance?

How much thought do we actually give about how to live in light of what Christ has given us? Or do we just go on autopilot? To take one example, just think about changing jobs.

[33 : 29] So typically, let's say you're thinking about changing jobs and to reach a decision, we might ask, does this new job pay me better? Does this new job promise me better personal satisfaction?

Does it give me more flexibility? Will it further my career? those are the typical questions we ask. But, if we are Christians, those are not the first questions we should be asking.

Rather, we should be asking first, does this new job give me an opportunity to be godly? Or will it hinder my godliness? Does taking this new job mean that I'm still able to seek his kingdom first?

Does this new job still give me opportunity to meet with my brothers and sisters regularly? Or does it mean that I'm often away and miss out on the feeding of God's word? Does this new job present me a new mission field?

Or does it simply make me more self-absorbed? Now, those are often not straightforward questions to answer, and wisdom and discernment is needed. But here's the thing to think about.

[34 : 41] Are we even asking those kind of questions in the first place? Or do we just end up thinking like the world anyway and just ask about better pay, better flexibility, etc.?

You see, often, an action or decision is not wrong in itself, like taking a new job. But the question is, where does that action or decision lead to?

Will it lead you to a situation where you're more likely to neglect or even lose your inheritance or not? And the daughters of Zelophehad and the clan leaders thought carefully about what they did.

They could easily have been satisfied with the decision made in Numbers 27 and left it at that. It was a good start. And yet, a good start does not guarantee a good ending.

Jesus makes that clear when he talks about people who first hear the word, accept it, but are eventually choked by the world, like seeds sown among thorns and rocky places.

[35 : 59] But these elders and the daughters, they had the foresight to intentionally consider how to keep holding on to their inheritance. and so they discerned and avoided potential threats to themselves.

But it's not just about intentionality. It's also about whole heartedness. Is it about God's solution? On one level, it can feel like God is limiting their freedom, doesn't it?

The daughters now can't marry whoever they like. Again, remember the issue here isn't that intermarrying outside your clan is wrong. The issue here is about protecting your inheritance.

But Zelophar's daughters, they heard the Lord's command and they obeyed. They did whatever it takes to make sure they held on to God's gift.

And so should we. We should commit ourselves to walk with God wholeheartedly doing whatever it takes not to drift away from Him.

[37 : 07] And one big way, of course, that we are often taken away is by getting ourselves into romantic relationships with those who don't share our faith. I wouldn't be surprised if right now there are a couple of you who are Christians but who are tempted to get into a relationship with a non-Christian.

Maybe you're already doing so. Well, if that's you, my friends, please know that that's a very dangerous thing to do. I'm sure the person you're thinking of is very nice and sweet and maybe behaves better than some of the Christians you know.

And I'm sure it can feel like the Bible is restricting your freedom by saying that marrying a non-Christian is a bad idea. But if you call yourself a Christian, that means at the most fundamental level, you diverge from your partner because you're not worshipping the same God.

Your commitments are different. And you might say that you're hoping to help him or her become a Christian. But my friends, in my pastoral experience, nine times out of ten, it goes the other way.

The other person helps you to become a non-Christian because you've already compromised. So whatever it is, whether it's romantic relationships or something else, don't give in to the pool.

[38 : 37] Hold on to your inheritance. Be wholehearted in our commitment. Do whatever it takes to make sure that you're following the Lord each and every day.

Strive every day to see Jesus as our treasure. As Don Carson once said, those who know where the treasure lies, joyfully abandon all else to secure it.

And if we truly know that our treasures are in Christ, well, we will be committed and we will be wholehearted. so as we come to the end, not just of this sermon, but of the entire book of Numbers, don't forget the overall message of the book of Numbers, well summarized in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verses 11 to 12.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings to us on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

Be careful that you don't fall. Do everything to hold on to your inheritance. But remember also the God of the book of Numbers.

[40 : 04] God is faithful. And when we've been unfaithful, the good news of the book of Numbers is that if we turn back to him, if we turn back to Christ, he's more than ready to forgive.

He can redeem your past mistakes and he promises rest. So brothers and sisters, as we finish in the book of Numbers, stand firm, hold on to your inheritance, let God do his here through things A kleine,