

THE STORY OF THE WORLD



Grace that Overcomes Grumbling

Numbers

Main Idea

God provides all that is needed for life; but our rebellion brings death; but God's grace overcomes death.

Overview

- What we've seen so far...
 - The one true God, who created all things out of nothing, graciously provides all good things for his people that we might trust him only and enjoy him fully
 - Yet, the first humans, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God
 - From the moment corruption enters the world, God sets about a plan to restore all things to the way they were intended to be
 - He will have his chosen people in his perfect place under his gracious rule
 - Genesis – God's Chosen People
 - Exodus/Leviticus – God's Gracious Rule
 - Numbers/Deuteronomy – God's Perfect Place
 - God is faithful to his faithless people
- **Chapters 1-10: God Provides All That is Needed for Life**
 - The first 10 chapters in Numbers detail how God has provided everything his people need to get to the Promised Land, the place of blessing, the place of fullness of life
 - Specifically we see that God has provided 3 things: people, priests, and his presence
 - People
 - Chapters 1 & 2 recount the census the Lord told Moses to take
 - The census is not randomly inserted to number God's people; it's preserved to show us God's faithfulness (cf. God's promise to Abraham in Gn 15)
 - Priests
 - The tribe of Levi was not part of the general census; they were set apart for God
 - Within the tribe of Levi you have two groups:
 - First you have non-priest Levites, who guarded the furnishing and helped setup the tabernacle as described in Chapters 3-4
 - Second you also have the priestly Levites, the sons of Aaron, who worked in the tabernacle; to commune with God and mediate his presence to others (Chs 6-8)
 - Presence
 - Chapter 9-10 show how cloud by day and fire by night, symbolize the presence of God, where always at the tabernacle
 - God is reminding his people, "I am with you and I'm going to lead you to the Promised Land"
- **Chapters 11-20: Our Rebellions Brings Death**

- In spite of God’s faithfulness, the people still prove to be faithless
 - Instead of eagerly anticipating what lies ahead the people repeatedly grumble about the present (cf. 11:1-4; 14:2; 14:27-29; 16:41; 21:5)
 - Because of their grumbling they are prevented from entering the Promised Land (cf. 14:30-34)
 - The 40 years is not a really big time out for bad behavior; it’s God’s judgment; a death sentence for the rebellious generation
 - Physical death here is a sign of the spiritual reality
- **Chapters 21-36: God’s Grace Overcomes Death**
 - The people are grumbling and complaining, and God would have every right just to wipe out the whole nation, but God is gracious and faithful, even to his faithless people. He would not give up
 - The Bronze Serpent (21:4-9; cf. Jn. 3:14-15)
 - When the people realized they had sinned against the Lord, they went to Moses, their mediator, and asked him to plead with the Lord to take the snakes away
 - Moses interceded for the people, but God did not take the snakes away; he did not remove the consequence for their sin, some still died; but he did provide a way to overcome it
 - Whenever a snake bit someone, they could look up at the serpent on the pole and live. The bronze serpent was a sign calling for people’s faith; they could look in faith, be delivered from death, and live
 - Same gospel message – saved by grace through faith
 - In Chapters 21-25, many nations try to keep God’s people from entering the Promised Land, but God’s promises and plans cannot be thwarted, and these nations are defeated.
 - In chapter 26 a new census is taken – the Exodus generation, except for Caleb and Joshua, has died out, just as God said it would.
 - In chapter 27, a new leader, Joshua, is identified
 - In chapters 32-35, God gives instructions on how the land is to be divided among the tribes – notice God never says “if you enter land” but “when you enter the land...”
 - In chapter 36 we read the final words of God in the book of Numbers, 36:9 – “Each of the tribes of the people shall hold on to its own inheritance” – God is faithful and will get his people to the promised land

Questions

Discussion Starter: *Why don’t we often think of grumbling or complaining as sin?*

1. Read Numbers 11:1-2, 45-46. Why is the significance of this census? What does it tell us about the character of God? What are some practical ways to take a “census” of God’s faithfulness to you?
2. Read Numbers 6:22-27. What does this tell us about the role of the priests? What does this tell us about blessing? How is that different than how we often use the word “blessing”?
3. Read Numbers 10:11-13, 35-36. How do you see hope in Moses’ words? How does this give you hope?
4. Read Numbers 11:1-6, 18-23; 14:1-11. What does this tell us about the nature of grumbling? What are some specific reasons grumbling is pervasive in our lives? How do we cultivate a life that is marked more by gratefulness than grumbling?
5. Read Numbers 14:26-35. What does this tell us about the seriousness of sin? Why do we often think of sin lightly?
6. Read Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:14-15. How do you see the Numbers passage pointing to man’s condition and God’s salvation by grace through faith?
7. Read Matthew 4:1-11. In light of Numbers, what does this passage communicate about the person and work of Jesus?

Accountability Question: *Where do you need to repent of grumbling and praise God for his grace in Christ?*