

Sunday Morning Message

February 16, 2020

*The Center of the Camp*

Text –

Congregational Reading – Numbers 1:51 - 54

## Introduction

We have been reading as a congregation through the Old Testament, and this week, we have concluded the Book of Leviticus and started the Book of Numbers. If you have been following along with the daily devotional blog, you have read several interesting posts developed from the reading, including a guest post by Wade from Leviticus 22 on Biblical Separation; and, one by Camille Stahl from Leviticus 26, on Obedience. On Saturday, Pastor Stahl discussed in his blog post the fact that the Levites, who were God's ministers in the Old Testament, only served in the Tabernacle from age thirty thru fifty.

Last Wednesday, we read from Leviticus 25 about God's principals regarding land management. The Israelites were commanded to rest their fields one year out of seven.

On Friday, we began reading in the Book of Numbers and we learned from there the positions of each of the tribes as they encamped around the Tabernacle. (See Diagram)

Each of the tribes with their families had a place where they camped in an area surrounding the Tabernacle. (Read Numbers 2:1 – 10 for an example)

The Levites were in the area immediately surrounding the Tabernacle with the priests closest to the entrance. (See Numbers 3:23; 3:29; 3:35; 3:38)

God was at the very center of the camp. Several times the Bible refers to God dwelling between the cherubims on the mercy seat.

God appeared to the congregation as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

When the pillar of cloud moved, the congregation of Israel moved.

*"Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: as they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards." (Numbers 2:17)*

Exodus 40:34 – 38 – The Congregation followed the cloud.

*"Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was*

*taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys." (Exodus 40:34-38)*

When the congregation was to move, according to Numbers 3 and 4, the Levites would pack up the Tabernacle. The priests would cover all of the Holy Things (Ark and mercy seat; Table of Shewbread; Altar of Incense, etc. The Kohathites would move the Holy Things; the Gershonites were in charge of dismantling and moving the tents and fabrics; the Merarites were responsible to taking down all of the boards, etc. and transporting them.

When they moved, the Levites stayed in the middle of the rest of the congregation with the disassembled Tabernacle, and the rest of the Congregation surrounded them. When they camped, the Levites set up the Tabernacle, and the congregation of Israel set up their tents in their places surrounding the Tabernacle.

God was at the center of the Tabernacle, and the Tabernacle was at the center of the Congregation. All of the worship was at the Tabernacle. When there was a meeting or an announcement, it was at the entrance to the Tabernacle. There were no individuals who did not participate. Everybody had their part, and everybody did their part. There were no other Tabernacles to join if you didn't like what was going on at this Tabernacle.

**Transition** – Let's fast-forward a couple of thousand years into this time of the New Testament Church. I believe that the Old Testament pattern, provides us with a picture of the relationship that should exist today between God and his church, and between the church and the congregation.

### **I. God needs to be at the very center of the church.**

Illustrate – Today, many groups who call themselves churches do not have God in the center of who they are and what they do.

If we are to be a true church, God has to be at the center of everything we are and do.

Turn to Revelation 1

*"And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle." (Revelation 1:12-13)*

*"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." (Revelation 1:20)*

*"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:1-5)*

God has to be in the midst of the candlestick, or else God will cause the candlestick to be removed. If God is not in the midst of the church, then the church will no longer be a church.

How do we keep God in the midst of His church:

### **1. By Keeping His Word Preeminent**

*"I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." (Psalm 138:2)*

*"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)*

Paul admonished Pastor Timothy:

*"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:14-17)*

We are Bible heavy here, and we need to stay that way. This is why we take more time to preach the Word in a service than we do sing or fellowship, or anything else.

The Bible must be preeminent.

### **2. By Making His Will Our Priority**

As a church, we cannot do what we want to do. We cannot vote in our own desires. We must do what God has called us to do, and that is fulfill His Great Commission.

*"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)*

God has commissioned us to do the same thing:

*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

(Matthew 28:18-20)

*"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."*

(Luke 24:44-48)

*"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)*

*"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."*

(Mark 16:15)

We keep Christ in the center of our church congregation by making a big deal out of the Word of God, and by fulfilling His will, which is preaching the gospel.

## **II. The Church (with God at the Center) Needs to Be at the Center of our Lives.**

The congregation of Israel lived their lives literally surrounding the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was at the very center of everything that they did.

I know this may sound a little out of step with modern ideas of raising families, but I firmly believe that your family's life ought to revolve around a local church.

Better stated – the Church ought to be a big part of your family life.

(Distinguish between the universal church concept and the local church concept.)

God should still be at the center of our lives; and the local church should be at the center of the life of our families. I have been a pastor now for many years, and I have been involved in God's

work as a layman even longer. I have observed that the families who place a high value on the local church, recognizing its importance, tend to be stronger and happier than the families that do not. Don't misunderstand, I do not think that the church has a higher priority than the home but I do believe that successful homes are built around a strong, Bible believing, New Testament church. The church's role is critical to healthy marriages and to the spiritual development of our children.

Take a moment to consider the role that the local church plays in your life; and then consider the role that you play in your local church. We need to keep our local church strong, and I believe that there are many ways that you can help.

How are you going to keep the Church (with God at its center) as the center of your life?

1. **Participate in the local church** – attend the services and find something that you can do that will serve others. God has uniquely equipped you in certain areas that can be used in the local church.

Help your church fulfil the Great Commission.

2. **Pray for your church and your pastors and leaders.** The ministry can be very discouraging, but you can be an encouragement to the people that minister to you simply by lifting them up in prayer. It wouldn't hurt for you to let them know on occasion that you are praying for them.
3. **Support your church with your tithes and offerings.** The work of God cannot go forward without the tithes of God's people. When you don't give you are telling God and the church that they have no place of value in your life. You can also support the church by not bashing it. Let people know where you stand. If you are for the ministry, speak out for it, and don't let others run it down in your presence. Negativity and complaining are like cancers inside the church that will destroy it from within.

## Conclusion

I want to be careful here to reemphasize that I do not believe the church is a replacement for God. God needs to be in the center of the church as well as in the center of your life.

I am also not elevating the church above your family. The family was instituted before the church, and God has given a great deal of priority to the role of the family.

But, I believe that if your family is going to be fully blessed of God, than it will make the local church a priority.

Is the local church important to you, or isn't it? God says that it should be. Remember, He died for the church. It's His body. He places a great value on it, and so should we.

