

Date : 10 September 2023

Theme : The journey of faith for the new generation

Topic : Loyalty to one another

Passage : Numbers 32

Key Verse : *“Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here? Now why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD has given them? Numbers 32:6-7 (NKJV)*

Introduction

In today's passage from **Numbers 32**, we see the 2nd generation Israelites ready to crossover and take possession of the Promised Land. God has given them the land but they must now enter to take possession. At this crossover point, loyalty to one another was tested. In order to possess the land every man was needed to fight the battle. But tensions arose. The loyalty of two tribes, Reuben and Gad, came into question which prompts Moses to say: *“Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here?”*

Loyalty to one another requires us to move from 'me' to 'we'. It requires us to value others above ourselves and looking into their interests (**Philippians 2:3-5**). To go far, we cannot depend on our own strength. It takes a team to achieve the dream and so we are now not to compete with one another but we are here to complete one another. Jesus commanded *“Love one another as I have loved you”*. And John the apostle says *“... all who love the Father love his children too.” (1 John 5:1 TLB)*.

The word loyalty brings to mind a powerful sense of belonging and solidarity, coupled with a devotion of duty to care for one another. So, in this church, we are to care for one another and encourage each other towards love and good works, and journey together as fellow travellers, walking shoulder-to-shoulder to strive for things that count for eternity.

1. What was the challenge facing the Israelites at the crossover point?

a) The Situation

- Where are they situated?
 - At this point in **Numbers 32**, the Israelites are on the east side of the Jordan River, on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho.
 - Battle ready: the census had been taken. Joshua had been appointed by God to be Israel's next leader.
 - Moses would not get into the land but he dedicatedly continued to lead the people right up to the edge of the crossover point, teaching the new generation the laws and instructions of God.
 - Moses in this initiative demonstrates how loving one another requires sacrifices, putting others in the body before his own need.
 - The LORD's instruction through Moses was for the Israelites to cross the Jordan into Canaan and *“take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess.” (Numbers 33:53)*. They are to distribute the land to the tribes by lot, according to their size.

b) Success in the past was because Israel fought as one and the Lord was with them

- Victories over the Amorites - Sihon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan, as well as the miraculous defeat of the Midianites, brought abundant gains in livestock which now pose a challenge of finding pastureland for the cattle.
- But when the 2 tribes had secured their position, it was so easy to abandon the others.
 - Today it is so common to see Christians walking out of the church when they see problems arising. They opt out because it is so convenient.

c) Pressing needs distracted them from the mission goal

- Solving problems by seeing the obvious.
 - The Reubenites and Gadites 'saw' the land they were on as good pastureland and they opted to stay put.
"The Reubenites and Gadites, who had very large herds and flocks, saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were suitable for livestock." (Numbers 32:1)

2. Why is their opting out an issue?

Moses objected to their opting out: ***"And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the LORD even more angry with Israel. If you turn away from following him, he will again leave all this people in the wilderness, and you will be the cause of their destruction."*** (Numbers 32:14-15)

a) It is sinning against the Lord

- Repeating the sins of their fathers
"standing in the place of your fathers and making the LORD even more angry with Israel." (vs 14)
 - Moses was afraid that the tribes of Reuben and Gad were about to repeat the sins of their fathers by not crossing into the promised land - at that time the people refused to take up the challenge when they listened to the ten spies who brought a bad report. This sin caused that generation to die in the wilderness.
- Failing to be loyal to one another constitutes covenant breaking
 - We are in a covenant relationship with God and with one another.

b) It is an issue of disloyalty to your brothers

- Parting company downgrades the value of your brothers.
"Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here? Numbers 32:6"
 - It showed that their brothers were of less value than their own inheritance.
- It is an issue of wrong priorities.
 - When they allowed their cattle to determine where they would live, rather than be with the people God valued, they have failed to align with God's will.

- Their unbelieving spirit told them that God could not provide grass on both sides of the Jordan River.
- It undermines mission focus
 - Mission goal (enter the Promised Land) vs Personal preference (feeding the flock).
 - Very clear mission goal: ***“take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess.”***
 - Their selfish choice made them lose sight of God’s desire to build a holy nation, not just their personal well-being.

c) How will this affect the community?

- Breaking loyalty removes trust
 - Breaking loyalty to the other tribes of Israel threatens unity.
 - It can lead to rebellion.
- Breaking loyalty stumbles others
 - Their decision not to go over to the Promised Land might influence others ***“Why do you discourage the Israelites from crossing over into the land the LORD has given them?”***. ***Numbers 32:7***).
 - ❖ Note: In the choice you make - someone will just follow you. Your family will probably be the first to follow you (*Be sure - If you live in the bright light of Sodom, your children will likely accept the lifestyle of Sodom*).
- Breaking loyalty is revolting to God. Why? Because when we say we love God, He expects us to love His people, His children, His church.

d) What conditions did Moses impose on them to let them inherit the land east of the Jordan River?

- Loyalty pledge with a warning to keep

- Change of position with a loyalty pledge - Loyalty was reinstated
 - Upon Moses’ objections, the two tribes repented and made a commitment of loyalty (***Numbers 32:17-19***). They will:
 - Send their fighting men with the army, not only to lead but to place their troops at the front of the column; and they will not return to their inherited land east of the Jordan until the conquest is complete.
- Warning on breaking the pledge
 - Moses allowed their plea to possess the land east of the Jordan River with a warning: ***“... if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.”*** (***Numbers 32:23***)
 - You cannot cheat or compromise before the Lord and get away with it. Your misdeeds will be revealed for judgement. His judgment may come in the area of your sin or in another area altogether, but His judgment is coming for sure. eg. Korah criticized Moses for his office, but God heard and buried him alive (***Numbers 16***).

- Even secret sins will be uncovered
eg. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, secretly went after Naaman and took a gift as reward for Elisha's prayer of healing for his leprosy, and ended up becoming a leper himself (**2 Kings 5:15-27**).

3. How do we keep loyalty to one another?

- Lessons learnt in the light of **Number 32** episode:

- Be loyal to one another in our body life of the church
 - Walk in unity in line with corporate goals.
 - Uphold each other in prayer.
 - Pray especially for leaders as they are more vulnerable at the frontline of ministry.
- Be responsible when making decisions in the body life of the church
 - We are responsible to inquire of the Lord and receive guidance to make the right decisions and not go for the obvious, because the choice we make have consequences – good or bad.
 - Don't just go for the obvious as it is not necessarily the best. If you follow the obvious you may end up short of what God has for you
eg. There was a famine in the land and Elimelech (husband of Naomi) from Bethlehem in Judah moved as a family to Moab where he and his two sons died, leaving behind 3 widows (**Ruth 1:1-5**).
- Be where you belong and see to its success
 - God places us in the exact places; even the church to belong to.
 - Being at the centre of God's will vs the permissive will of God.
 - Build on the right side of the 'river' with your fellow travellers. The choices we make have bearing on our future.
- Be a brother keeper.
 - When you notice someone in your cell group had been absent from cell meeting or worship, could you keep praying for him and to get in touch?

Application

1. How will you associate **Numbers 32:23** in your display of loyalty to one another?

2. What are some ways you can act that will show loyalty to your fellow travellers in this church?

(i) In serving and in your wholehearted participation in worship and church life.
(eg. in your church outreach activities; participation in church life including praying corporately; being there for each other in celebration events like baptism picnic, etc).

(ii) In areas requiring equipping, will you get trained to be fit for the good work in the body of Christ, eg. in sharpening your skills in leading a friend to the saving knowledge of Christ and in mentoring.

(Note: a course on following up a new believer is currently on. Will you sign up? Note that the previous weeks' sessions are recorded and made available to those who signed up.)