

Exod 04-11-07a

We have gathered to worship on this Sunday morning, the 7th of November 2004. We continue in our study of the book of Exodus. We left Moses in the presence of God.

God proclaiming His mighty name. We'll take a moment here to go to the Lord in prayer. Then we'll have our scripture reading and dive back into chapter 34.

Shall we pray? Father, thank you for another opportunity to gather and to nourish our souls through the heavenly sustenance that comes through your word. We thank you for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, without whom we could not understand, we could not process, we could not apply, we could not have the power to live the life that you have called us to. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who gave us both of these great gifts through His work on the cross, who sits at your right hand and intercedes on our behalf.

We thank you that we are not defined by this world. We are not entrapped in our circumstances. We are eternal.

We have a hope. We have an objective. We have goals that stretch beyond the limits of this life.

We are not limited to what can be seen under the sun. It is not the endless cycle of things that Solomon describes in Ecclesiastes that hems us in. We have that great life that you have revealed to us, have promised to us and have given to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask your blessing on us as we study this morning. We thank you for answered prayer. We thank you for vindicating and honoring our President and giving him the opportunity to lead our nation for another four years.

We thank you for the opportunity that our country has been given, the space of time in which people can reflect and can respond to the values that are founded and drawn from your word. We pray that the truth of your word will go forth in our nation and beyond, that missionary endeavors, that the intrinsic good that is a part of that biblical foundation will be manifest, that people will respond to it, that our light will shine in a dark place, and that the course of our nation's history will be greatly influenced by the presence of believers who understand your word and who are moving forward in your plan. We pray that we can be in that number.

We ask that you would work in and through us, not only individually and collectively, but as salt and light to be a blessing to each other and to those in our periphery. We ask your blessing on us now as we study your word. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Our scripture reading this morning is in the book of Numbers. We're going to jump forward a little bit for our scripture reading in the history of Israel to a later time, not much later, but this is the time when Israel has moved to the border of the promised land and has the opportunity to enter.

I like to think of my life, I think believers in this age are poised on the banks of the Jordan. And although in Christian folklore the Jordan seems to represent death and Canaan represents heaven, we know, or we should know by now, that the transition from the wilderness to the promised land is not heaven. It's not what happens after death.

One of my favorite spirituals is I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger Traveling Through This Weary Land. I'm going over Jordan. I'm going over home.

I love that song. I like the tune of it. It's kind of mournful sounding.

Emmylou Harris does a great version of that song if you ever get a chance to hear it. But it's just as wrongheaded as it can be. It reflects this misunderstanding of what the Jordan and what the promised land represent.

It represents the opportunity to move into maturity in this life, to reach a place where our training is over and we can function. It is the graduation from boot camp into service. It is the graduation from elementary school and junior high and high school and perhaps college into the adult world where you now make use of your training and your education to be a fruitful and productive member of society.

Those are some analogies. And heaven help us if we spend all of our time in first grade in this life and then we think we're going to graduate to adulthood just as a result of death and being promoted into the resurrection life. That's a sad thing because if you leave this life as a baby, you're going to enter the next one as a baby.

And that's not what God has called us to. Israel going into the land is not death. Israel going into the land is graduation.

Patty and I graduated back in 1975 from high school. And you have these high school graduation things where you put on the robes and you sing a song and a couple of people give a speech and, oh, we're poised on the, you know, it's funny to go back and read the speeches because you don't know a cotton picking thing when you're a 12th grader and you're going to give a speech and I want to thank everybody for, you have no idea what you're talking about when you're a 12th grader. I had to give one of those speeches and I saved it.

And I knew at the time that I didn't know what I was talking about. So my remarks were very brief. But I remember we sang this song because back in the 70s, you know, Karen Carpenter was still around and we've only just begun.

They made our whole class sing this song. Hated it at the time. Still could do without it.

But we've only just begun to, you know, and that song is about getting married. White Lace and Promises, a kiss for luck. I mean, we've only begun our married life and the song is good in that sense, but it's retarded in my view to sing it as a, well, you can't say retarded.

That's politically incorrect. It's mentally challenged to sing that as a graduation song. But my point is there is a sense in which you're transitioning.

You're not going to be in public school anymore. You're through with that and you are going to go out into life and try to make something of it. Learn a trade.

Get a job. Get married. Do all the things that you have been preparing for 17 or 18 years to do, right? That's what the Jordan represents.

You don't get to high school graduation and then they give you lethal injections as you leave the stage. Well, okay, you got through school. You're done.

It's the beginning of adult function. That's what this represents. Well, here's Israel in Numbers chapter 14 getting ready to graduate from their training in the wilderness.

God says, I've put you there 40, well, not 40 years, but at this point they have come. This is their first opportunity to go in. And He says, look, I brought you out of Egypt.

I've sustained you here for these months in the wilderness. Brought you to Sinai. Giving you the covenant.

You broke the covenant. I've renewed the covenant. Let's go in and get this job done of driving out the infidels.

Driving out the godless, pagan, savage, idol-worshipping, baby-sacrificing, blood-letting, worthless people. Drive them out and seize the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God says, I will give it to you.

Well, that's where we are poised. This is what I like to think of in my life. We have the opportunity to go in and lay claim to a promised inheritance.

Daily. And you think, well, I don't see any promised inheritance when my car is breaking. When my utilities get shut off for no good reason.

When I'm facing this challenge and that challenge. And there's more month than there is money. And there's personality.

There's all of this, that, and the other. People testing. Circumstance testing.

Internal testing. The world, the flesh, and the devil. All of this stuff is obscuring my view.

Well, that's exactly right. That's what it's intended to do. And we have to fight our way through.

When I was a plebe, you have all of these upper-class midshipmen shouting in your face. Trying to confuse you. Trying to distract you.

Trying to keep you from being able to think. And you have to learn to think under pressure.

That's why we're here.

The wilderness experience between salvation and entering the place of maturity is a training ground for thinking under pressure. The world, the flesh, and the devil are shouting in our face. Shouting in our ears.

Trying to beat us down. Trying to keep us from focusing on the goal and on the objective. That's what daily life is.

That's why we talk about, once we're oriented to the grace of God. That God has made provision for every need. The very next stage up.

You remember those five parts of growing to maturity. The ground floor is orientation to God's grace. In my notes, I make a little rectangle with five boxes in it.

The bottom floor is G-slash-O. Grace orientation. Then the next one up is MDL.

Mastery of the details of life. This is where you have to think through the shouting. And the smoke screen that is being blown in your face.

And then the third one is relaxed mental attitude. You are stable. You are lashed to the mast of God's grace.

And though the storm may blow about you, I shall not be moved. It's a great gospel song. I shall not be moved.

And so my abbreviation for that is RMA. G-O-M-D-L-R-M-A. Not return material authorization.

Relaxed mental attitude. Once you have got the static and the noise subdued. And you can see the goal and you are working toward it no matter what.

Now you begin to develop capacity. All of that is management of negative things if you think about it. I am hopeless, helpless, and useless without the grace of God.

I have got to manage the negativity. Within and without. God's grace is sufficient for that.

I have to believe it. I have to claim it. I have to grab hold of it.

That's my foundation. That allows me to master the details of life. That allows me to relax and not worry.

Not overthink. Not get deflected in my thinking. I can focus.

I can concentrate. Now I am in a place where I have capacity. Now I move into the positive side.

Capacity for life. Capacity for love. Capacity for happiness.

If God gives me a blessing, I can actually enjoy it. I can bask in it. I can appreciate it.

I can sit there in the relaxation of my mental attitude with the details of life stuffed safely into the box of God's grace. I can view that great sunrise. I can view the scenery.

I can smell the flowers or the coffee or whatever it is you like to smell. You have the ability to appreciate life. Things that might just go right by somebody else are deeply meaningful and deeply satisfying in that capacity phase.

That is built on God's grace taking away all of the negative. Now you can focus. Now you can operate.

Now you can see. Who is it? Johnny? What's his name? I can see clearly now. The pain is gone.

The storm is gone. All of the bad stuff has disappeared. That's not a bad song if you listen to the words.

It reminds me of breaking through the fog in the spiritual life. I can see clearly now. I can appreciate clearly.

Once we reach that place, we become really focused and achieve a genuine love for the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the top floor, occupation with Christ. You start with G-O and you end up with O-C, occupation with Christ. Well, that is maturity.

In the same way that you don't instantly graduate from school and suddenly become a flighty, scattered, disorganized, unreliable person and then they hand you your diploma and suddenly you are consistent and all of these great things. Our maturity continues to be a gradual process. Even as adults, we mature in a lot of ways.

We are going to continue to grow in all of those areas. I think of it like a pyramid where the base continues to expand as you expand the top. If you are going to make these others bigger, everything underneath has to get bigger also.

This is where Israel is. I know it is a long introduction to our study, but it is very important what we are going to see as we go forward in Exodus 34. Here is Israel.

At the foot of Mount Sinai, they are essentially in the same place. This is the spiritual potential of the covenant of God. God is about to renew the covenant.

God is proclaiming who He is. And all of those things we have just talked about that relate to Christian maturity, grace orientation, getting past whether or not I have got food, do I have quail meat, do I have the leeks and onions of Egypt, or the leeks and garlicks, whatever it was, being relaxed, not worrying, oh, God has brought us out here to die. Capacity to appreciate the journey through the wilderness.

Capacity to see the potential as they come up to the bank of the Jordan River and not look at the land, don't look at the giants. This is the test when they get to the bank. The spies come back and they give two reports.

The land is great. Look at the size of these grapes. Two guys with a pole bring back this one cluster of grapes because they are just plentiful and rich.

The land is great. The other part of the report is the giants are big. So, what are you going to do? Are you going to say, let God handle the giants, I'm going for the grapes.

I'm going for the land of milk and honey. Look, God promised it. God doesn't make a promise and then not give you the ability, He doesn't hold out a gift and then chop off your hands.

If He's going to give you the gift, He's going to give you the ability to receive it and to obtain it. That's how it is with our spiritual inheritance. That's our opportunity in this life and in the next.

God has made us many great and precious promises. If we look at the positive side and believe that what God has said is true, we can march across the Jordan into that land and lay claim to our inheritance. If, like the Israelites here in Numbers chapter 14, we can't see that potential, the giants are too big, the obstacles are too great, I am too enmeshed and mired in the problems, you're going to drop on the wrong side of the Jordan.

These are the people that John talks about in Revelation, whose portion, whose piece of the inheritance pie, is the smoke ascending from the lake of fire. They just didn't get the life of faith. We can fail to get the life of faith and therefore we will fail to get our portion of the inheritance and we will be outside the heavenly city.

They always talk about St. Peter and the pearly gates. What they don't realize is that a lot of believers are going to get turned back at the pearly gates because the pearly gates are the gates of the new Jerusalem. And there's a lot of believers.

And if St. Peter is the gatekeeper, he's going to be turning away thousands upon thousands of believers who didn't get it. That's what Numbers 14 is about in the physical sense of going into the land. But keep in mind as we read it this morning, this is what's happening at the base of Mount Sinai spiritually.

This is a physical reflection of what's going on at the mountain. What are you going to choose? Look at Numbers 14. And all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.

Why? Look at the end of the previous chapter, 13:31. The men who had gone up with him said, We are not able to go up against the people. They are stronger than we.

And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants. And all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. Now is this true? Is this true? Everybody in the land is of great stature? No.

No. There's lots of normal people. But what happens when you have a problem? Your problem

just swells and occupies all of your vision.

You can't appreciate anything that may be great or that may be normal when this one abnormal thing fills your view. I've got a wound on my hand from playing with chicken wire yesterday. If I hold my hand at a normal distance, I can see that, but I can see all of you in the rest of this room.

But if I stick it right up here in my eye, I see nothing but this wound. And that's what they've done. They've taken one feature.

Yes, there were some tall guys in there. All the people in the land. Just put your hand right over your eyes.

All the people in the land are huge. Come on. It's impossible.

Yes, they've got some big guys in there. But they're not all that way. The women, the children, most of the people in there, they're just normal little... And in these days, people were shorter anyway.

They're looking at somebody... King Saul was head and shoulders in a later day above the people, but not everybody in the line of Kish or everybody in the tribe of Benjamin. Anyway, this is a great exaggeration. And it's just wrong, but we can do this.

All the people whom we saw, men of great stature, there we saw the giants, the descendants of Anak, came from the giants. And we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so were we in their sight. Now, you know, there's all kinds of psychology that says don't adopt the negativity that somebody else has.

Somebody looks at you and doesn't like you, and so you... I don't like myself anymore because so-and-so doesn't like me. So-and-so says I'm this, that, and the other, so that's how I am. They said, boy, those people looked at us and we were grasshoppers in their sight, so I'm a grasshopper now in my own sight.

That's just wrong. That's just wrong. We have to make a choice whether we are defined by what people think or we're defined by what God thinks.

People may look at us and say, I think you're skinny, I think you're fat, I think you're short, I think you're tall, I think you're this or I think you're that. Well, you know, obviously we take into consideration what people say or what people think to make sure we're not actually in some egregious... I think if you look at a 600-pound person and you say, you know, you're overweight, they need to listen to that. They are overweight, terribly overweight, and they can't just say, I feel good about myself.

You know, they have these fat people clothes where they say, I like myself, and we're all going to be 500 or 600 pounds. That's just not glorifying to God. If your body is a temple, you don't

build the temple until it swarms over the mountain.

There's no city left. But, I mean, my point being, there is a time to listen to God-fearing people who speak the truth to you in love, but in terms of self-image, in terms of self-worth, in terms of what is my value, what is my place in the plan and purpose of God. That comes from God.

That comes from Scripture. And God tells the people, I'm giving you this land. I promised it to your fathers, and I'm bringing you to this land.

I am giving it to you. God says, I will drive out the inhabitants before you. When they say, the inhabitants are tall and we're like grasshoppers, what are they saying? A grasshopper can't drive out the giants.

I have to do it myself. And this is subjectivity. I have to solve this problem myself.

What have they done? They've just grabbed the responsibility for driving out the inhabitants, which God said He would do. And they've said, no, we've got to do it. We can't do it.

Therefore, all is lost. Well, why didn't you listen to God? Why didn't you have a little faith in God? If God says He'll drive them out, try walking in and watch them fall and drop and be slaughtered before you. God said, one of you will put to flight a thousand.

Not if you don't believe that He will. It's a choice. So this is why they are lifting up their voices and crying.

The people wept that night. All the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron and the whole congregation said to them, if only we had died in the land of Egypt. Obviously, it would have been better to die in Egypt as a slave than to travel as free people and arrive at a land flowing with milk and honey, see some giants, and be made afraid.

Oh no, I'd rather be dead. Patty was pointing out that there was this fella that they ran a sting operation on that was trying to hire a hitman to snuff out his wife and make it look like an accident. Of course, they were videotaping the whole thing.

And once he had made the incriminating statements and brought in the \$1,000 worth of drugs that he had stolen to pay for the hit, they burst in and put guns on him and handcuffed him and arrested him. Then he started sobbing and crying. What a pathetic, self-centered loser.

He is so selfish. All he can think about, he was saying, just kill me, just kill me. I don't want to live.

My life is over. And the guy, one of the policemen said, no, your life is not over. And it was sort of prophetic because after he went through his trial and was convicted of both things, felony distribution of controlled substances and attempted aggravated murder, the judge gave him 12 months.

And his life was by no means over. But he was so self-centered and sobbing around. But the point here is, if only we had died in the, you know, I just want to die.

Well, it's, no you don't. Nobody really, if they did, they would just kill themselves. And these people don't just say, where's my sword, let me fall on it.

It's just the pathetic loser syndrome. It's inability to focus, inability to concentrate. We want to avoid it.

If only we had died in the wilderness. Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword? Not a single person has fallen by the sword. Not a single one.

Nobody has died. Now, if you sent in 12 spies, and one came back and said, you know the other 11 guys, the Jihadis just stepped on them, squashed them. Only I am left to tell thee.

Now you can weep. You know, if God lets your spies get slaughtered. Nobody has died.

This is all in their minds. Would it be better for us to return to Egypt? They said to one another, let us select a leader and return to Egypt. Well, God has given them a leader.

They have seen the face of Moses glowing in the dark with the glory of God. Let's pick a leader. Why do they have to pick a leader? Because they know, good and well, Moses, God's man, is not going to lead them back to Egypt.

So this is a repudiation of God. Everything God has said, the messenger, the prophet, the leader that God has commissioned and given to them. It's a rejection of everything.

Based on what? Hearsay. They haven't seen anything except the cluster of grapes. Now if they had brought a giant tied hand and foot on the pole, look at the size of this giant we brought back.

But all they have seen, the tangible evidence, is of the good of the land. Right? Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. I think we would all do the same.

You know, I can't even look at you people. I'm just going to fall on my face. Joshua the son of Nun, Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes.

They spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel saying, the land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us. A land which flows with milk and honey.

Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land. They are our bread. Their protection has departed from them.

And the Lord is with us. Notice, their protection has departed. Their protection is gone.

They are our meat. We will go in there and eat them like bread. The Lord is with us.

Do not fear them. All the congregation said to stone them with stones. What are they thinking? You know, you look at them and you think, what is the matter with you people? But, of course, we do the same thing.

Now, the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel as people are starting to pick up rocks and say, look at these nincompoops here that are trying to get us all killed. And they are picking up large stones. Suddenly, there is a backlight.

Suddenly, everything is thrown into silhouette. And as they look, they see the glory of the Lord appearing in the tabernacle, which we are anticipating is going to be built. Then the Lord said to Moses, How long will these people reject me? How long will they not believe me with all the signs which I have... He doesn't say, why are the people rejecting the spies, does he? That's not really the problem.

The problem is they don't believe the promise of God. And when the spies come in and say, here's the problems, and they choose between the problem and the promise, they go with the problem. How long will they not believe me with all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence.

I will disinherit them. I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they. Moses said to the Lord, Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by your might you brought these people up from among them.

They will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, the Lord, are among these people, that you, Lord, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands above them, and you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of your fame will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring these people to the land which he swore to give them, therefore he killed them in the wilderness.

Now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as you have spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, the Lord is abundant in mercy, the Lord forgives iniquity and transgression, but he by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of your mercy, just as you have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now. This is an application of the very passage we are studying, isn't it? Moses remembers what God says on this occasion where his glory passes, and this preserves the life of an entire nation.

God is ready to obliterate them and start over with Moses. But Moses cites, he quotes back to God, God's own words, and he applies them. He says, now you have said that you will forgive, you have said that you will bring this people in, and if you do not keep your word, your

reputation, your name will suffer.

We've looked in the beginning of Hebrews at the name that God has given to the Lord Jesus Christ by inheritance. It's God's own name, it's God's own reputation. The Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment and the character in Greek, the explicit manifestation of the name, the reputation, the essence, the inner being of God himself.

So Moses says, look, I'm taking that to the bank. You have said that you're a God that forgives, and you have said that you're going to bring these people into the land. I'm holding you to your word, and this is what we can pray as well.

We can claim the promises of God. If we look around in our circumstances, and we are doing what we're supposed to do, you remember what Joshua and Caleb said up here, if the Lord delights in us, he will fulfill his promise. There is a condition on the promise.

You have to be one in whom the Lord delights. The people that God does not delight in are the people who don't believe him, and they will not receive the fulfillment of the promise. It is a conditional promise.

Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of your mercy, just as you have forgiven people, even from Egypt until now. And Moses says, historically, you have fulfilled your promise. You're not going to stop now, are you? Well, we can do this same thing.

This is a great model for prayer to the Lord. We have situations, and we can look around and say, Lord, I'm doing my part. I am getting back on the narrow road when I stray.

I am acknowledging my sins. I am walking in the light. I am taking in your word.

I am meditating on it. I am trying to apply it in my life. Here is a situation, and I need the fulfillment of your promise.

Now notice, God has set Moses up for this, hasn't he? God, in ultimate actuality, has no intention of obliterating his people, but he tells Moses he's going to, right? And in the same way, we sometimes see a situation where it looks like the promise of God is not going to be fulfilled. Well, God is setting us up, just like he's setting up Moses here. God is putting it to us to see if we will claim his promise, if we'll recite it back to him.

If we'll say, look, Lord, it's not going the way you said, and you said it would be your grace. You said it would be your forgiveness. You said it would be your provision.

You said you would solve problems. I'm holding you to that promise. Well, God has created the situation to elicit that response from us.

And if we fail and just say la vie or get distracted or go into our own solutions or cry and stone the messenger or whatever, that's not going to help. We have to do what Moses does. We have to hold God to his word.

That's what he's requiring of us. That's why he sets up the situation where it looks like his grace is not in evidence, where it looks like the solution is not there. Of course not.

If it always came, if you could see it coming from a distance over the horizon, there would be no faith. Faith is the substance of things that you hope for, the evidence of what you don't see. How can you exercise faith unless there's something you don't see? The people here don't see how they're going to conquer the giants.

That's why it's an occasion for faith. Caleb and Joshua say, look, and Moses, here's the promise of God. This is what we're being called to.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up right in the middle of God's proclamation of how he deals with sin. We're right in the middle of it.

We looked at the three categories last time. Iniquity, transgression, and sin. Now we're going to look at what does it mean when he says, not clearing the guilty.

That's where we'll pick up when we come back.