

Numbers 33

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[0 : 0 0] We all have certain places and certain family memories, don't we? and certain events as families that are kind of embedded in your family's history! You drive past somewhere where one of your siblings threw up outside a restaurant! Or there's a car wash in swanvy very funny memories for us brothers and not for my sister and there's certain places in all our families where you have kind of family memories certain places that have got certain memories just the mention of them makes you laugh and as you kind of read Numbers 33 you have this list of unpronounceable names that looks to you and I like it's meaningless it looks like a really badly written travel blog it's a poignant statement it helps you at the start of Numbers 33 to understand everything that is going on in this travel blog that everything you'll read in Numbers 33 has got theological significance everything you read in Numbers 33 has got something to do with the triumph of God and the grace of God in the lives of sinners and his triumph of sinners and his enemies and at the end of Numbers 33 you reach the point where they're about to enter the land and there they are faced with God's enemies the Canaanites and God says to them this is what you are to do to them and if you don't do this to them well here's what I'll do to you and so the chapter starts with the Egyptians and God's Greece to Israel and God's judgment to the Egyptians and the chapter ends with God's Greece to Israel and God's judgment to the Canaanites and there is this kind of theological principle that has been given to us again and again in Numbers that this book is really a diary of how God has helped his people Israel and Numbers 33 is no different to see how God has done wonderful things in the lives of his people to see how God indeed is saving us and in many ways I think that this chapter is really a real life action of that verse in the New Testament you know the verse he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion and Numbers 33 is in many ways the Old Testament equivalent of that he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion here if you like in Numbers 33 is show and tell you know when children are asked after their holidays to bring in something to say about their holiday to show and tell and so here is what it means and what it looks like in real life for God to rescue it's not a meaningless list and it's not a purposeless list it is meant to display God's grace and God's grace

God's glory in his grace and in his judgment and yet on the other hand it is a piece of literature that is Hebrew literature and when it's translated into English it does lose a bit of life and it appears stale and that is partly because a lot falls away in the translation we miss a lot in translation and you can miss a lot here there are significant things about the way this chapter is put together about what is put in and what is left out it is significant in highlighting God's goodness and the nature of grace to us and so if you take time to count the number of places that are named it turns out that there are 42 42 named places 42 places from the beginning to the end of the plains of Moab so is the number 42 significant in the Bible?

are we into that? we all into different kind of numbers are we into that? we're not into numerology alright that's not the kind of church we are but actually it does turn out that the number 42 is significant in the Bible let me give you two reasons why I think it's important and one might be totally coincidental but I don't think it is no one thought Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus Christ begins with Abraham and that genealogy is divided into three groups of 14 and so you end up with 14 starts with Abraham 14 descendants to David 14 to the exile and then starts from there to Jesus and certain people are left out and so it's quite a stylised genealogy family tree why would Matthew write primarily to Jewish people and wanting to show that the scriptures are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ why would Matthew pick that number?

well it's a significant number here too he's arranging a genealogy and this shows a complete work a complete picture of what God does and how God works it's a way of putting things together but for the Hebrew mind as he's hearing these names and he sees that number it's significant and perhaps

maybe I'm completely wrong but maybe the Hebrew reader reading Matthew's Gospel it would jump out they learnt this chapter they learnt numbers and they knew that there were 42 places there's a way of knowing their history but Matthew uses it as a way of exalting Jesus Matthew draws attention in that list of names 42 names to draw our attention to the Lord Jesus and his saving work and this writer in number 33 is drawing our attention to God and the things of God and one way I think he does that is by the number 42 but you can disagree with that the second way is the people enter into rest it's picked up on in Hebrews it's spoken of as a spiritual rest that's where all believers are heading that's where we are here today on the Lord's day we are resting for our labours in order that we rest in Christ there remains that and rest for the people of God and the significant thing about rest in that whole biblical principle is that you get 6 days of work and you get 1 day of rest it's a great blessing section 1 that's the letter and the way that this particular arrangement of places has come about is that there are 6 groups of 7 do you maths 42 places that are grouped together from Egypt to the present position on the plains of Moab which means you automatically know that you're about to enter the 7th group of 7 it's an incomplete which is the same way of saying we're about to enter rest you're right at the end of the promised land and you're entering the promised land and entering the promised land they were meant to enter the rest that God had provided and so the book of Hebrews takes that up to show you with all its significance that to enter into God's rest is to believe and trust in the gospel and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ you're on the edge of entering into the rest of all that God has laid up for you and that I think is very significant and helpful in showing us why is this list being put together in the way that it has so when you look at it you're looking to see what does he teach them at some of the places as I read them you recognise them you thought oh yes we've read about that before back in Exodus and in Numbers we can look them up other parts of the Pentateuch other places

I don't know whether you picked it up there are names where you think oh yeah bad things happened there I remember that there was rebellion there there are places out there that we don't like the name of because it reminds us of failure you like that?

[8 : 54] and places where it reminds you of rebellion or defiance against God same here there are some place names that would have brought back painful memories to the people of Israel some reminders of astonishing blessings and some are reminders of astonishing sin and there are some places which are reminders that I recall of nothing and we don't know all the particular details and maybe they did but we don't in my family I'm the youngest by eight years to my siblings I've got an eight year old a brother who's eight years older and a sister who's ten years older than me and a brother who's twelve years older than me it probably explains a lot doesn't it and they when we're together will often say do you remember such and such of course I can't remember it kind of nod and smile and go along with them we spit out that for the people of Israel and some of them won't have been born when the events talked about numbers 33 happened they'll have heard about it from their family and from their parents but some of them wouldn't have been around when these events that were talked about in numbers 33 happened do you remember kind of everyone over the age of 20 or 21 dies so you've got this generation hearing a list of places and what happened there and it's probably they're familiar from hearsay with these lists but some of them they'll not know very much about them and they maybe will probably know all the names but we don't actually there are names in this passage that we know absolutely nothing about that are not anywhere else in the bible and they know much more about it than we do but we don't know anything and there are things that are good and there are things that are bad and there are things that we just don't know but if that's the case what is God teaching us so four things that I think are helpful and encouraging in this passage first of all a passage like this shows us the work of God among his people and it shows us my first point is that our God is good and faithful and in many ways that's the kind of opening trumpet blast of the chapter and everything that follows is in vain the opening trumpet blast tells us of the Passover and so we know about the Passover don't we and where the Lord was merciful to his own people there was blood on the lintels and on the doorposts and the angel of death passed over them and they are safe and they are rested and they are secure in the hands of their God but on the Egyptians the Egyptians lost their firstborn it was the most stunning grief to fall upon a whole nation and we can't even begin to imagine what it was like can we to experience the angel of death moving that night every household having a firstborn die an empty chair at the breakfast table that next morning and some families lost more than one didn't they because a father might have been the firstborn in his family and then his firstborn son was killed maybe the grandfather was the firstborn in his family as well and it must have been a devastating blow or grief

to them but we're told that the Israelites went out triumphantly at the sight of all the Egyptians because the Lord had struck them down and we're also told that on their gods too the Lord executed judgment the great victory was always a spiritual victory these gods were false gods and God shows them and that is always the way of God's work he triumphs over the evil one he triumphs over false gods and that reaches doesn't it its ultimate place in the triumph

of our Lord Jesus Christ where he triumphs by his death and his resurrection and he makes an open triumph over Satan and all his hosts we read it and we are being told from the very beginning that you're not just reading history you're not just reading a travel guide you are reading about your God and you are reading that he is good and that he is faithful and you are reading that he keeps his promises and he does what he says he will do because he who has begun a good work in you will bring that work to completion but look at the beginning of that work look how powerful it is look how triumphant an act it is look how much it is a display of the saving power of God over all that is evil and all that is opposed to him and all that says no to him it is the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ for shadow and we should remember that every day every day of our lives no matter where we're going no matter what course our life is taking us from one step to the next we should remember to thank God that he's begun a good work in us that he has laid bare his mighty arm and he's come down to save us it's the glory of God that he is good and it's the glory of God that he is faithful to his own delivered people one thing for us to grasp and fix in so the second thing that we need to grasp while we remember that God is good and that God is faithful we must remember that we are sinners and this point will change by the end of the point because there are places aren't there and there are little things that we read of in Numbers 33 and we know that something happened do you remember

Admarah Marah what was it a place of it was a place of bitterness and grumbling and complaining that went on about the congregation and the people of God and we know don't we that something horrible happened in the desert of sin and in Rephidim something bad happened at Kadesh do you remember that ten spies were sent out to go and see what promised land was like and they came back and the report was it's a great land it's a fine land but we'll never take it and we're not going to be able to do it and Numbers uses that great phrase isn't it that they discouraged the hearts of the people and we read some of these names and we know what happened and it's almost like there's a little pause and then we're told they came to a place where Aaron was going to die look at verse 38 and Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the Lord and died there in the fortieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt on the first day of the fifth month that's a sad verse isn't it and that is a reminder of the nature of sin but here's an interesting fact Egypt identifies a place where Israel turned their backs on the Lord and yet strangely enough if you didn't know and didn't already know Israel's history of rebellion you wouldn't know it from this account you wouldn't know the background you wouldn't know that any of these negative things happened whereas the itinerary list of the place of God's faithfulness spoken about it passes in complete and total silence over Israel's unfaithfulness it mentions the places of Thuv but it doesn't speak about the spiritual rebellion that happened there even Aaron's death which came as a result of his sin and rebellion is here presented can you see it in verse 38 as a simple act of obedience to the Lord's command and I think it's right to observe that in the way that the chapter is put together every place is a reminder of sin it's a reminder that we are prone to be unfaithful to God and a reminder that you and I are prone to sin but it shows us that we need to be reminded of that fact the fact even more that God's forgetfulness as well as

God's faithfulness I think it's significant isn't it that God's inspired summary which is number 33 of Israel's wanderings he chooses to pass over their sin in silence isn't that a precious truth and sometimes we are afraid to look over our own past after being overwhelmed by the reality of sin it seems too painful for us to remember all the ways in which we failed God and there's more to it even than that isn't there because we don't even remember all the ways in which we failed God look at the passage does the passage record the unfaithful acts that we know happened in those places no why did God not record it and I don't argue with you because it's an example of the nature of forgiveness and it's an example of the way in which God chooses to forget and to pass on and not to bring to mind again now in terms of how that should affect your soul tonight there's two things firstly when we're overwhelmed by sins that we committed or when we're overwhelmed that we don't even remember as many as you've committed you should remember can't you that God in his great forgiving grace in Christ chooses not to remember that that is part of the nature of grace isn't

that interesting it's very easy to say first point

[19 : 20] God is good and God is faithful second point I'm sinful and something in us tends to say that says okay that's easier to say than first point God is good and faithful second point God is forgiving he's forgiving that's harder maybe part of our struggle is not just as we look at ourselves and our own sin but maybe the other side of this truth is we find it hard to be forgiving to others we find it hard don't we very difficult to practice that same kind of forgetfulness and we find it hard especially if a certain sin is associated with a certain place or a certain time it comes back to you every time it can often feel like when somebody sins against you you remember it there are certain places certain times certain names certain people certain smells certain sounds that bring it home to you and how hard it is to be forgiving and that is this is the nature of the gospel and the grace of God to us and we need to pray for grace to help us to help us grow in his mercies God is faithful and God is good God is forgiving and this text is a reminder to us that God is always faithful faithful some of these places here they've got no other reference in the Bible we don't really know anything about them we don't even know how to pronounce them as you can tell we don't know what may or may not have happened there something may have happened there something may not have happened there we don't know about when God doesn't want us to know it's not necessary for you and I to know it's possible isn't it that nothing happened and there are places listed that are simply just on the journey service station type places Lee Delamare or Kiel and there's some measure of comfort in this because you might look at your life and think that that third category the kind of we don't know anything about these places well that's the story of your life and nothing much really happens you might be saying to yourself there are no big events in my life no big deals our real life is just always ordinary nothing ever happens nothing happens at all when I was growing up my favourite band when I was a teenager was called

Delmetri and there's a reason why you don't know about them but they tour through well they had lots of good songs they were unappreciated but the one song that is always on Magic FM I'm at that age where I listen to Magic FM is Nothing Ever Happens I've waited 16 years to put this telephone exchanges click while there's nobody there the Martians could land in the car park and no one would care close circuit cameras in department stores shoot the same movie every day and the stars of these films neither die nor get killed just survive constant action replay and nothing ever happens nothing happens at all the needle returns to the star of the song and we all sing along like before and we'll all be lonely tonight and lonely tomorrow and Bill Holdings advertise products that nobody needs while Angry from Manchester writes to complain about all the repeats on TV and computer terminals report some gains on the values of copper and tin while American businessmen snap up

Pankoff's for the price of a hospital wing and nothing ever happens nothing happens at all the needle returns to the star of the song and we'll all sing along like before nothing really happens and every one of these places we just don't know what happens God marched them into that place and God marched them out of that place and it was his itinerary for them and that's what's important to remember one conger on this point says God is faithful on Tuesdays I don't know why you pick Tuesdays maybe Tuesdays is kind of nothing day but God is faithful on ordinary days on all the same old same old days and you need to be sure that you have the right perspective and so there are days where you'll say what did you do today nothing much same old same old same old I got up got the kids to school fixed up around the house met up with some people picked the kids up from school did tea put them to bed I think all I did today was no importance what did you do today got up went to work did my work came home went to bed that's all I did same old same old people could have said what did you do today I got up what did you manor manor manor again and I marched with the rabble to this place manor for tea went to bed what did you do today I got up manor for breakfast again manor manor manor I marched with the rabble to the place manor for tea went to bed same old same old yet who led you there and who was with you there was the pillar of cloud there the pillar of fire was God there it was an ordinary day thank God for ordinary days thank God for ordinary days they are sweet they are far sweeter than sad days aren't they sorrowful days broken days days in which sin erupts into your life thank

[25 : 48] God because this truth that God is faithful God is always faithful God is good God is forgiving God is always faithful and lastly God demands that he and he alone is to be worshipped the end of this chapter comes and the first of several laws before we come to the end of the book of Numbers that's the way the book is set up you get a list of things and a bunch of laws a list of things

and a bunch of laws and the people are told I led you here and I led you here and I was faithful and good and I was forgiving and I'm always faithful so when you get into this land here are six sets of seven have passed and you are about to enter the Sabbath you're about to enter the rest you're about to go into the land and when you get there you are to worship the one true God and you are not to tolerate the presence of the Canaanites you are to exterminate the Canaanites and you're not to leave any of them and you're to carry down all their figured stones you're to destroy all their metal images and their idolatry you're to demolish their high places and you're not to let any of these people remain because if you do not drive them out they'll be like barbs in your eyes they'll be like thorns in your sight and they'll trouble you in the land where you dwell and I will do to you as I thought to do to them and that is because

God will maintain his pure worship and God's people are not to mix worship of God with the worship and the forms and the lifestyle of the Canaanite people it's a call to holiness it's a call to passionate holiness and it resolves itself in worshipping the one true and living God it's not cruelty on the part of God to exterminate the Canaanites because he'd allowed their sin and their rebellion to grow to its fullest form he was patient with them but it was grace to the Israelites to say don't tolerate them any part because there must be an eradication of all that is sinful and contrary to the worship of God but we of course tonight we come to the worship of God only through Jesus Christ and so it must be Christ and Christ alone who leads us in our worship and leads us to the Father that we might glorify him and there's much for us to take from that and we'll look at that in coming weeks because there's a whole set of laws

God is to be worshipped and God alone is to be worshipped and that is why he saves and that is why he was faithful in redeeming these people and forgiving these people and that is why he is always faithful because the Father desires worshippers and the Son purchases worshippers with his shed blood that is who you are but if you trusted in Christ you are a blood bought worshipper of the one true God and you worship him and no one else and nothing else because no one else is worthy and no one else is good and no one else is forgiving and no one else is always faithful and he alone demands that you worship him alone let's pray and no let's pray!
Let's pray let's pray and no