

# then it's settled

numbers 32.1-33

As all of you have no doubt noticed by now, it's a challenging time in the lives of most Americans. Society is changing in many ways. The economy has changed in monumental ways. And more and more, people are settling for less than what they had once hoped for.

For example, one recent study revealed that these days 40% of college graduates end up taking a job that doesn't even require a college degree. Another study I was reading about found that currently almost one in three men said they would be willing to marry someone that they weren't in love with if enough other criteria were present.

Compulsive gamblers aside, it seems that more and more people are getting used to the idea of not really getting all they were hoping for out of life.

It's not just relationships and economics where this is happening though. As we open up the pages of Scripture, we find that human beings by nature have a difficult time not settling for less in the spiritual life. We even sing songs about it.

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.*

Part of our fallen nature is a propensity to lose pace with a God who is on the move. We know that because the Bible is full of examples and warnings and instructions not to settle for less than what the Lord desires for us and what He's called us to.

When you look at the analogies that God uses to describe what He wants our relationship with Him to be like, we see that they are full of continuation and progress and pursuit. He says that His desire is to make us like a tree planted by rivers of water that grows and brings forth fruit season after season after season.

Jesus said that our relationship with Him was like a bride waiting for her groom to appear, keeping herself prepared so that when He comes to whisk her away she'll be ready to start their new life together.

Paul compared our spiritual lives to running a race. And not running just to participate or place, but running to win.

These are the kinds of images we're given because what the Lord says to us is the same thing He's always said to His people, and that's "Follow Me! Follow Me to a new land where I can develop you and use you and transform you."

But this kind of relationship that God has made for us requires that we trust in His direction and His destination for our lives. It requires that we walk by faith and go on an adventure with Him.

And that's not something we're prone to do. We're prone to settle for less. And because of that, the Bible gives us examples of times that God's people missed out on all He intended for them because they just took the first thing that came along, or took an easier route.

We're going to look at one of those examples this morning. It's in Numbers chapter 32. After 400 years as slaves in Egypt, God's people were finally free. It was an 11 day journey to Canaan, but because of reluctance and sin, the people had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Finally, we're at the point in their history where it's time to cross the Jordan and get about the business of inheriting what God had prepared for them.

But then we read:

**Numbers 32.1-33 - Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that indeed the region was a place for livestock, the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon, the country which the Lord defeated before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." Therefore they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan."**

**And Moses said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben: "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? Thus your fathers did when I sent them away from Kadesh Barnea to see the land. For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them. So the Lord's anger was aroused on that day, and He swore an oath, saying, 'Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have wholly followed the Lord.' So the Lord's anger was aroused against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord was gone. And look! You have risen in your fathers' place, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more the fierce anger of the Lord against Israel. For if you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people."**

**Then they came near to him and said: "We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones, but we ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the children of Israel until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this eastern side of the Jordan."**

**Then Moses said to them: "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the Lord for the war, and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the Lord until He has**

driven out His enemies from before Him, and the land is subdued before the Lord, then afterward you may return and be blameless before the Lord and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out. Build cities for your little ones and folds for your sheep, and do what has proceeded out of your mouth.” And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying: “Your servants will do as my lord commands. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock will be there in the cities of Gilead; but your servants will cross over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, just as my lord says.”

So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel. And Moses said to them: “If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben cross over the Jordan with you, every man armed for battle before the Lord, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead as a possession. But if they do not cross over armed with you, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan.”

Then the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying: “As the Lord has said to your servants, so we will do. We will cross over armed before the Lord into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us on this side of the Jordan.”

So Moses gave to the children of Gad, to the children of Reuben, and to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land with its cities within the borders, the cities of the surrounding country.

This is a very interesting and very serious text because not only is this story meant to serve as an example to us, but we can also look back and see that this decision that these tribes made changed the course of history. Their lives and the lives of the people of Israel as a whole were completely different following this decision.

The question is - were they right? Did they do the right thing? We see how Moses reacted at first, but then by the end he said, “Sure, go ahead and do what’re you doing.” Some commentators side with Moses and are equally harsh with the Gadites and Reubenites. Others feel like he overreacted and shouldn’t have been so upset.

After all, weren’t they still God’s people? Did it really matter which side of the Jordan they were on? As we look at this text, I think you can make a very strong case that it *did* matter which side they were on. Because you can look down the road at the effects of this decision to see what the consequences and conclusions were. And we can also hear what these two tribes said to Moses and see the many assumptions they made about the decision they were making. And we’ll see that each of their assumptions were totally wrong and that, in the end, they missed out on so much of what God wanted for their lives and their families and their future.

We’ve already set the stage, but let me give a little more detail. After 40 years in the desert, God was finally giving the Israelites the green light to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land. The land that God’s people had been waiting for since the time of Abraham. As they had journeyed from Egypt to Canaan, they had encountered some opposition. When they were

attacked, God protected His people and gave them victories over their enemies. Shortly before they were about to cross the Jordan, 2 tribes of Israel decided to change their plans.

**Numbers 32.1-5 - Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that indeed the region was a place for livestock, the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon, the country which the Lord defeated before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." Therefore they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan."**

The first assumption that they made was that God wanted them to stay there, outside of the promised land. Look at verse 19:

**Numbers 32.19 - We will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this eastern side of the Jordan.**

Because the land they were at had good places of pasture, they knew their flocks and herds would do well there. Because it was financially and physically beneficial, they assumed that this must really be the inheritance God had for them. Even though that isn't what God had said.

This is often an assumption we make. That whatever makes us more wealthy and more comfortable, whatever makes more economic sense *must* be what God wants for us. But this isn't really how the Christian life works. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of the Christian life is to be self-sacrifice, not self-indulgence.

Now, that doesn't mean that every Christian is called to give every last penny and possession away, though some are called to that. But here's the thing to remember: We may not be called to give up everything *IN* our lives, but we are called to give up total control *OF* our lives so that God can redirect us to a better destination that He has in mind. And the route to His destinations always include sacrifice.

Abraham was called to leave his father and mother, leave his home, for a land he didn't know.

Peter was called to leave his nets and follow Jesus Christ that he might become an apostle and fisher of men.

The rich young ruler was called to sell all he had and give up his dependence on his material possessions.

The Christian life as described in the Bible is a life lived out on the altar of sacrifice. Offering up ourselves into the hands of God for His will and good pleasure. And if we can't pinpoint specific moments of *real* sacrifice, then we're more characteristic of the Gadites here in Numbers 32 than we are of Abraham or Peter or Paul who wrote that living a life of sacrifice was reasonable and acceptable and expected of Believers in Jesus Christ.

There were a lot of other assumptions these 2 tribes made. They assumed that there would be nothing better for them on the other side of the river. So they settled for the first thing that came along.

God had made many promises about the Land and about how wonderful conditions would be for the people there, but they clearly had a small vision of what was ahead and a small view of the God who was leading them. The Lord had told them in Exodus 23 that He was going to give them everything from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. That it would be a land flowing with milk and honey. They wouldn't have diseases or any barrenness. They would have long lives and be blessed.

But in response to that, these 2 tribes said, "Yeah, but there's grass right here that my donkeys can eat."

What's your vision of God? Is He small and distant? Or is He great and mighty?

In Mark 10:51 a blind man was calling out to Jesus and the Lord said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And it's interesting to think about how each of us would answer that question. Not because we should look at God as some sort of spiritual vending machine, but because the answer to that question will demonstrate what kind of vision we have when it comes to our relationship with the Lord. We can go to God and any moment in prayer and speak to Him and commune with Him and petition Him. And we should never think of Him as small.

Something else we see in our text is that these tribes assumed that a physically successful life would lead to a better future for their kids. In verse 16 they cite their kids as a reason why they were determined to stay on the east side of the Jordan.

But here's the problem with their logic - this decision, by definition, *couldn't* benefit their families' spiritual lives because they would hang back while the Tabernacle and the presence of the Lord continued forward. By staying in Gilead, it would make going to worship the Lord and being a part of the assembly very difficult for these tribes. In just a short time, when the other tribes enter into Canaan, they do so only when God miraculously parts the Jordan river so that they can cross. But the Reubenites and Gadites were convinced that they were creating a better future for their kids, despite the fact that they were placing barriers between themselves and the Lord's house.

We can look forward into their history to see if this plan they had for their kids worked out. They placed the material and physical as a priority in their decision making and it didn't lead to children who were more in love with God or more devoted to Him, instead, it led to the opposite. These tribes were the first to fall into idolatry. Fast forward all the way to the New Testament. Jesus visits some descendants of these tribes, later known as the Gadarenes. It's the famous story where the Lord cast a legion of demons out of a man and into a herd of swine. The herd then ran over a cliff and into the sea, at which point the Gadarenes came out and begged Jesus to leave them. He was an inconvenience to their economic pursuits.

What we should recognize is that any decision that puts distance between us and the Lord, between us and His house, introducing obstacles to our worship and service to the Lord, are decisions that God does not want for us. Even if the result is more convenience or more

material success. Nearness to God is invaluable because it is necessary for our lives and our futures.

But these tribes assumed that they didn't really need to be that near to the Lord.

They also made the assumption that their decision to stop short of God's calling wouldn't have any effect on their brothers and sisters in the other tribes. Moses called them out on that. He said:

**Numbers 32.6-7 - And Moses said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben: "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?"**

Then the Reubenites and Gadites come to Moses and say, "That's not going to happen! No one is going to be discouraged. We'll go in and help you guys settle into your inheritance, and everyone will be happy for us."

But then, out of nowhere, in verse 33 we read that not only did their example influence others to stop short of what God wanted, but their decision also split a tribe in two. Half the tribe of Manasseh saw what was going on and spoke up and said, "Yeah, us too. We'll stay." This decision was discouraging people from finishing strong. And it would have other implications on the community.

The whole community would have to wait for these 2 and a half tribes to build homes and pens and fortifications for themselves.

They'd also have to pick up the slack that these tribes were leaving when it came to the conquest of the land. This is why Moses said, "Hey are you going to just sit around while your brothers go to war?" And they answered, "Of course not!"

**Numbers 32.27 - [we're going to] cross over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, just as my lord says!** (emphasis mine)

But that's not what happened. When the time came to begin the conquest, Scripture records that these tribes sent 40,000 soldiers to fight and left 70,580 soldiers home to protect their own cities. To sit while their brethren fought.

Sadly, this is still what happens among God's people. Jesus said,

**Matthew 9.37b - ...The harvest truly is plentiful but the laborers are few.**

And what we should understand is that our life of faith is not only meant to accomplish work for the Lord, but also to encourage the people around us to be about the Lord's business as well. And the decisions we make can encourage or discourage people from pursuing God's will in their own lives.

As we close up this text we should see that these tribes made a lot of assumptions about the land they were staying in, about the decision they were making, but they were wrong. And

because they didn't prioritize the Lord, they set themselves on a path leading to much, much less than what God wanted for them. They wasted opportunity. They wasted their calling. They wasted the real inheritance that was waiting for them.

They thought the best pursuit was physical wealth and comfort and security. And they didn't really believe that they needed to be near to God. They didn't really see the need for any transformation in their lives. "We own livestock. That's all we're ever going to do. This is a good spot for livestock, so we're staying here. You go on ahead. You dwell in nearness to God. You can have those other things He talked about, we don't need that as long as our flocks and herds are happy and healthy."

See, they thought they had found a shortcut to success and security, but they were simply wrong. I remember in the California History course that I took in college we watched a documentary on the Donner Party. One of the darkest incidents in our national history. There was actually a lot of intrigue throughout their journey from Missouri to California. One of the decisions they made was to take a shortcut suggested by one of the travelers through what is called the Hastings Cutoff. That shortcut runs through Utah's mountains and the Great Salt Lake Desert. It was folly to try to travel that route with wagons and families and it slowed their pace so dramatically that by the time they made it to their entry into California, winter had arrived, with the snow and the horrifying tragedy that followed.

What we must understand is that we will miss out on much of God's blessing and transformation in our lives if we choose to live by sight and not by faith. That's what these tribes did. But we're supposed to live the opposite. This is a principle that the Bible gives us very plainly.

**Proverbs 3.5-6 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.**

The Lord said in Deuteronomy:

**Deuteronomy 1.30-33 - The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.**

The New Living Translation reads that last part this way:

*"The Lord your God...goes before you, looking for the best places to camp."*

God intends to bring us somewhere in life so that He can bless us and transform us. He intends to have an adventure with us and He goes out to find the very best campgrounds. The very best route. The very best locations and situations so that our lives can be full of real, lasting value. A Christian who isn't having an adventure with God is like a being married to someone you don't love. And what we find in the Bible is that God invites us to have something remarkable with Him. Not to live hazardously or without any responsibility or normalcy, but to

live life by faith. To trust the Lord and allow Him to take you somewhere. To allow Him to change your life and redefine your priorities and transform you.

We've seen the road signs which indicate that we're on the Reubenite/Gadite path. Those assumptions they made. When we are making those same assumptions and those same decisions, there's a good chance we're not on the path God has called us to.

But there are also road signs along the disciple road. Signs that we're headed the way God wants us to go.

What are they? Well, the first and foremost is that our decisions comply with the word of God. That when we look in the Bible and see what God has asked His people to do we can see ourselves described. That we show love and serve others. That we give to the work of the Kingdom. That we obey those things God has asked to or not to do.

Another sign that we're following the direction of the Lord is if we can find ourselves persevering in some service or ministry that He's asked us to do. Once the disciples were fishing all night. They hadn't caught a thing. Exhausted they turned in for the day, yet Jesus invited them to cast their nets out one more time. They did, and the boat was unable to hold all the fish. There will be times when we're serving the Lord that He asks us to cast our nets out another time past the point we think useful or prudent or sensible. But Jesus loves to give His disciples situations like that so we can see that *He* is the Author of the good things in our lives.

Finally, a sign that we're following the Lord is the simple fact that our lives won't always make sense, especially to those who aren't Believers. If all our decisions always make practical sense, always make economic sense, always make life more convenient, then we will be hard pressed to prove to the world that God has called us to a life of radical faith. Our lives aren't always supposed to make human sense.

As you live out your life today and in the days to come, don't settle for what's easy. And don't always let your eyes decide what would be best.

**1 John 2.15-17 - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

The Lord is leading you somewhere today and He knows where to camp. Don't miss out on the adventure of a lifetime because you were willing to settle for less.

{fasting}