

[eliasaph]

:: Numbers 3.23-26 // Numbers 4.21-28 ::

This morning we have our final One Verse Wonder. It's our tenth study in this series and we're going to wrap it up by looking at a man mentioned only once in God's word, in Numbers chapter 3.

Today our focus will be our service to the Lord. Seems like these studies have been speaking a lot about our personal devotion to the Lord and our mindset as Christians, but also we've seen how we can serve God day by day wherever He has placed us.

Those reminders may be fundamental, but they are always important. Because the Christian life is meant to be simple. Not without effort, but simple. And when we start complicating our spiritual lives is when we lose traction with the path of God, which is defined in the Bible as wonderful, powerful and full of joy.

After God led His people out of Israel and they were wandering in the wilderness, the Lord established the Law and had them build a tabernacle for worship and sacrifices. The tribe of Levi was chosen to perpetually serve in the tabernacle throughout all their generations. They were set aside by God forever.

Then, as the Lord got more specific about how they were to carry all these tasks out, we find that the Levites were divided by families into groups that were assigned specific duties.

So, starting in Numbers 3.23, we read:

Numbers 3.23-26 - The families of the Gersonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward. And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael. The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting included the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them.

Our one-verse-wonder is this guy Eliasaph, the son of Lael, who at the time was the leader of the Gershonite families. He's our example and our devotional stand-in. His family is mentioned a few times in the Scriptures, but he is only listed here in verse 24.

Head over one chapter, to Numbers 4, and the assignment of this family is repeated with a little more detail. Starting in verse 24:

Numbers 4.24-28 - This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and carrying: They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting with its covering, the cover of badger skins that is on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle

and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve.

Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties shall be under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

So you have the Gershonites, seen here, then you have two other Levite family groups: the Merarites and the Kohathites. The Kohathites were assigned to the altar and the Ark of the Covenant, and the table of showbread and some other cool stuff.

The Merarites got the beautiful pillars and sockets that hung out in the tabernacle.

And the Gershonites got the tent fabric and a couple of screen doors.

From a human perspective, our man got the short straw. They got the stuff that was covered in desert dust. They got the plain stuff. Heavy stuff. They got a couple of screen doors.

Now, think about this for a minute. God is delivering the Law to Moses and the administrative instructions for this new life the nation had begun. The Levites are gathered together to receive their assignments, given to the 3 family groups, and of all the items, you're given the tent, the screen door, and the hangings of the court. Those hangings are big, linen walls that you can read about in Exodus 27.

On a human level we have an immediate tendency to start comparing the assignments the different families got. And, in our own lives, we sort value certain types of service to God over others. But in Eliasaph and in this distribution from God that we see, we find that God's mind is very different than man's mind.

If we put ourselves in the place of Eliasaph, then devotionally we find that we are sons of Lael. Lael means 'Belonging to God.'

When we became born again, when we became Christians, we were purchased by Jesus Christ. Saved, yes, but also purchased by His blood. We know the song: *I've been purchased, I've been pardoned, bound to Him I'm truly free.* We now literally belong to God.

Since we belong to God, since He purchased us by paying the ultimate price, we become bondservants to Him. As servants of a loving Master, we should be thrilled to take part in our duties in His Kingdom, no matter if the service seems 'great' or not, whether He asks us to speak to multitudes or mop the floors, the proper perspective is that we serve a God of love who doesn't have to save us or love us or speak to us or help us, yet He does.

So often we hear stories of people who made deals with God when they were in a life and death situation. "God, I'll do anything if you get me out of this."

But now that God has given us new life, now that He has saved us from death, the question is: do we have a willingness to do *anything* He asks us to do, no matter how difficult or humble?

Matthew 8.19 - Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."

It's one thing to say that, it's another thing to do it. But that is up to us. Sometimes our actions don't live up to that statement. When God calls us in service, we need to remember that we belong to Him and that all we are, everything we have, our very lives are because of His grace. And He is worth our honor and our praise and our sacrifice and our devotion.

Second, our service to the Lord can be strenuous. It is a burden. Now, Jesus *did* say:

Matthew 11.30 - My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

But there is a burden in service. Our spiritual lives aren't just about receiving and kicking back. Spiritually speaking, we can rest when we're dead. Because the moment we're dead, we will be present with the Lord and we will enter into His rest.

A faithful servant, a bondservant, continues his labor day by day. These passages in Numbers don't really sugar-coat the work that the Gershonites were going to have to do. God said, "This is your duty. This is your service. You've gotta **carry** these curtains and these hangings. It's **work**. It's wonderful, but it isn't just you sitting around doing nothing."

The call of God is work. God calls us to put on His yoke and His burden. Praise the Lord that He supplies us with all the strength we need to carry it, His yoke is easy. His burden is light. But our spiritual lives are meant to be like a servant, who works, not a noble who sits around and never raises a finger. If we're not serving God, then we're not living out the will of God, and that's a problem.

The Gershonites were given a specific task and were to have that assignment throughout their generations. If I'm Eliasaph, I'd be comparing our stuff to the Kohathites, and I'd be trying to make a deal. "Ok, Lord, how about we trade them a screen door for one of those beautiful, gold-covered things? How about they get one of the curtains, and we get one of their glamorous assignments, like the Ark or the Altar."

But that isn't how servanthood works, because servanthood is not about status. The Master makes the call. He looks at us and determines what He wants each of us to do. To one servant He gives 10 talents, to one servant He gives 5 talents, to one servant He gives 1 talent, each according to his ability. Not because He is a respecter of persons, but because He knows us, knows where we're at, knows how He's gifted us and knows how to use our lives in the perfect way.

When we start comparing and complaining and coveting is when we've left the realm of bondservant and entered into the realm of hireling. And God doesn't want any hirelings in His Kingdom.

So where are we going with all this? Looking at Eliasaph and the Gershonites, what's the message? Is it, "suck it up and stop complaining"? Well, maybe. If you're a complainer, then it's time to stop complaining.

I'm a complainer. And I need to check that attitude in my life. If you're like me, we just need to cut that out of our hearts and stop doing it. That's part of the message today.

What about, "Stop comparing your ministry"? That's part of it too. Comparison is always bad. When Jesus was talking to the 11 disciples over breakfast after His resurrection, He was telling them about some of the stuff that was going to happen. Immediately they started comparing themselves and asking the Lord, "well, what about *THIS* guy?"

Jesus said, "what is that to you?"

The reason He said that is because our service is only about **us** and **the Lord**. Our service is about our faithfulness, not prominence, not how we stack up against other people. When we start comparing ourselves and our service to others, it just becomes toxic. "Well they do this and I do that." When we start living that way, that's when discontent and compromise set in. And that's not what it's about. Your life is about you and Jesus and how faithful you were to what He wanted for you. Not about how we compare to others.

But here's the best focus of the message today. The best focus is always God's heart and His desire for your life as an individual. It has 3 parts.

Eliasaph's name means, "*God gathers*" or, "*God has added.*"

And what we find on a devotional level is this:

First, every aspect of service is important. We might look on the assignments of the Gershonites and ascribe that less value than that of the Kohathites, for example, but that's all just a human thing. To God, each piece of service is important. Without fabric there is no tabernacle. Without the showbread, there is no tabernacle. Both are part of God's plan, both are necessary and glorify to Him.

Jesus said that just giving someone a cup of water was like personally ministering to Him. We should never devalue any faithful service to God simply because it's less flashy or prominent than something else. That's not how God works.

Second, we see in Eliasaph that God *gathers* His people for His service. We believe that God specifically gifts and then assigns us as individuals to serve in a specific ministry in a specific local church. That's how the Bible explains our service to us as New Testament believers. Spiritually speaking, we know that we are purchased servants who belong to the Lord, so we know that every single one of us has tasks that He desires we partake in. Therefore, our duty is to go before the Lord and discover the things He wants us to do and that's exciting!

If we're not showing up for duty, we become like the faithless servant who just buried his talent in the ground, and God cannot reward that kind of life, because He has called us to active duty.

Third, we see in Eliasaph that God *has added* to our lives. If we see ourselves as servants, if we behave like bondservants who are loyal to our Master, then we will quickly discover that God has added meaning to our lives like never before, He's added reward to our lives like never before, He's added maturity to us like never before. He's added *His Kingdom* to our daily living.

Not only that, but God has gone on record as saying that if we are faithful, then He will add to our lives more opportunities, more service, more spiritual responsibility.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all this will be *added* to you.

Matthew 25.21 - Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. (NLT)

So here's the deal...

Each of us are called to be bondservants of God. He has saved us. He has gifted us and trained us. And He has given us the call to serve. That calling is optional only in the sense that we have the freedom to follow God or ignore Him.

Today is an opportunity for you to serve the Lord, whether that be giving someone a cup of water or leading someone in the sinner's prayer. All forms of service to God glorify Him and please Him, therefore we have no need to complain or compare ourselves to others, because those things are only going to hurt our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Instead, be overjoyed today by the simple but mind-blowing fact that God has selected you for specific service and assignment and you get to discover it. Your entire life has been set aside, purchased, so that God can deliver heaven to you and through you. God has added to your life and to my life unspeakable blessings.

If our response to God is *anything* other than "Here I am, Lord, send me," then we've lost sight of what it means to to be a servant and to be a Christian.

Romans 12.1 - And so, dear brothers I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. (NLT)