

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Num. 18, The applications of Numbers 18 in the New Testament

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. We are going to continue to read Numbers chapter 18. Yesterday we already finished reading all the verses of chapter 18. Today I would like to use some time to fellowship about the application of Numbers chapter 18 in the New Testament.

Numbers chapter 18 very clearly and definitely defines the duties of the priests and the Levites among the Israelites, as well as the provision for their living. The priests fulfill their duties within the tabernacle and at the altar, and they help the Israelites present offerings to God. The Levites take the place of the firstborn among the Israelites, and are given by God to the priests to help handle the affairs of the tabernacle of meeting. The Levites may not touch the most holy objects in the tabernacle of meeting; they are responsible for guarding and carrying the tabernacle of meeting, lest the Israelites intrude into the tabernacle of meeting by mistake and bear sin.

After the Israelites enter the good land and obtain the land as an inheritance, a tenth of the firstfruits is to be presented to God. God gives this tithe to the Levites as the wages for their toil in the tabernacle of meeting. And the Levites in turn are to present a tenth of what they receive to God, and God gives this tenth to the priests, to supply their living. Besides this, when the Israelites present offerings to God, all those heave offerings which do not pass through the fire are also to be given to the priests. Therefore, in the social structure of the Israelites, there are clear duties, a clear division of labor, and also a clear supply. By the New Testament, Peter says that every saint has the status of a priest. It is not like among the Israelites, where there were three strata — Israelites, Levites, and priests — each stratum having definite duties which could not be overstepped. Then how should we apply the Old Testament principle, such as is set forth in Numbers chapter 18? This is the first question.

Among the Israelites, God laid down the regulation of the tithe. The tithe of the Israelites took care of the living of the Levites, and the tithe of the Levites took care of the living of the priests. By the New Testament, Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:14-15 also says that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel, but Paul added a sentence: this authority I have never used at all. Then how should those who serve God in the New Testament make their living? How should the principle revealed in Numbers chapter 18 in the Old Testament be applied? Why did Paul not use it? This is the second question.

Neither of these two questions is easy to answer, because different churches have different visions, different frameworks, and different organizations; therefore, different answers will presumably also be produced. I am only answering with respect to the vision and framework of the church that I prefer, and this answer is not necessarily applicable in churches with different visions and frameworks. May the Lord grant every saint spiritual wisdom and the ability to discern; we are not to criticize, not to tear down, but with tolerance and patience, upon the existing framework, to seek the answer that most accords with God's heart.

Let us first deal with the first question. First, three months after the Israelites had just come out of Egypt, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai, and God revealed to the Israelites His best will. In Exodus 19:4-6, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

In God's best will, God hoped that the Israelites would become a kingdom of priests, that is, that every person would be a priest and could come directly to serve God. But this was conditional: they had seen God lead them out of Egypt, they had seen what God did to the Egyptians, and so they were to obey God's word and keep God's covenant. Very evidently, the Israelites did not fulfill the condition God set forth; right at the foot of Mount Sinai, they cast a golden calf, and even declared that the golden calf was the god who brought them out of Egypt. After the incident

of the golden calf, God raised up the Levites to take the place of the firstborn of the households of Israel and to serve God on behalf of the Israelites; and from among the Levites He chose Aaron as the priestly family. Only then were the details of the division of labor and the boundaries of duty among the Israelites, the Levites, and the priests laid down.

Aaron, as high priest, is a type of Christ; every saint of the New Testament, because of believing in Jesus Christ, has obtained regeneration from the Holy Spirit, and therefore has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and has life that comes from God. So Peter says that we are all a royal priesthood; this is spoken of from the standpoint of life and standing. However, in actual practice, not every saint necessarily has the maturity of life to serve as a priest, nor sufficient gifts to fulfill the office of priest. Therefore, the New Testament saints must measure their own office from these two dimensions: life and gift.

Romans 8:29-30, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

In these two verses, Paul leads us to look at our office from a higher dimension. It is that God foreknew us and predestined every one of us to live like Jesus Christ, so that Jesus Christ can, with full worthiness, become God's firstborn Son and also become our elder brother. Therefore, God, according to His foreknowledge, predestined the image every one of us is to grow into, and this is the commission God gives us.

After God's predestination, He calls us; and after we are called, God justifies us, and tells us very definitely that when Christ comes again, He will cause our bodies to be glorified. Paul in Romans chapter 8 tells us in a very balanced way about God's predestination; he also tells us how every saint should grow in life and gift in order to complete the commission God predestined.

In Romans 8:1-14, Paul sets out four stages of the growth of a saint's life. The first stage is knowing the law of the Spirit of life, which is in 8:2. This includes every saint

who has received grace and been saved: he has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and he has also experienced that only by depending on the Holy Spirit can he be freed from the law of sin and of death. This stage includes all the saints, and corresponds to the Israelites in the Old Testament.

The second stage is being able to be led by the Spirit of God, which is in 8:9 and 8:14. The saint's life begins to grow; he learns to set his mind on the spirit and not on the flesh, and so he can be led by the Spirit of God and begin to serve in the church. Usually it starts from service in practical affairs, which helps us to submit, and also helps me to learn to be faithful in fulfilling duty; this corresponds to the service of the Levites among the Israelites in the Old Testament. There are many saints who, in such service, have found their commission, and faithfully take the service of the Levites as their lifelong ministry, and finally attain to the point of maturity in life.

What kind of service one takes up is a matter of gift; carrying out the service God commissions to the point that accords with God's heart is a matter of life. When Christ comes again, the reward given to the saints before the judgment seat of Christ is based on life, not on gift. Therefore, even doing the service of a Levite can obtain a glorious reward.

The third stage is having the Spirit of Christ and being able to become one who belongs to Christ; this is in the latter half of 8:9 through verse 10. In the church, a saint, through service in practical affairs, learns to follow the leading of the Spirit of God, and he begins to have a burden for people. Serving people and doing things are not the same; people are far harder to handle than things. The best pattern for serving people is Jesus Christ. In the four Gospels it is very clearly recorded how Jesus, while fulfilling His ministry on earth, served people. Whoever has the heart's desire to serve people must enter the school of Christ and learn Christ's love, care, patience, and never giving up toward people. In this way, gradually he has the Spirit of Christ and becomes one who belongs to Christ. Aaron, as high priest, is a type of Christ; being able to serve people according to the pattern of Christ corresponds to the priests among the Israelites in the Old Testament.

The fourth stage is having the Spirit of the One who was raised, which is in 8:11. This is God's special gift: he is not only able to follow the leading of the Spirit of God, and to have the Spirit of Christ so as to serve people, but he is also frequently brought into the place of death, and experiences the great power of resurrection from the dead. He grows a gift that crosses churches, and becomes a blessing to many churches; he has an apostolic gift, and the apostle Paul is the best pattern.

Dear brothers and sisters, because of the limitation of time, I cannot fellowship too much, and can only stop here. If the saints wish to pursue this further, please review the daily Bible reading in Romans chapter 8. In addition, at the 2026 joint retreat of the Christian assemblies of all Taiwan, I gave a series of messages calling for overcomers. The second message among them discusses this very subject. I will put the link to the message in the comment section, for the saints' reference.

Let us go on to look at the second question. In fact this question is linked to the first question; they are not two independent questions. Among the Israelites in the Old Testament, God clearly defined the three classes of people — Israelites, Levites, and priests — because the Israelites collectively rebelled against God, so that they lost the status and standing to serve God. The New Testament church is different: every saint has the status and standing of a priest. The churches in the first century A.D. were all established by the apostles. The apostles of the early church encouraged every saint to participate in service, whether service in practical affairs or priestly service. Paul also several times used the metaphor of the body to tell the saints that they are all members of the body of Christ, and that every saint is to heed the direction of the Head and fulfill the function of a member. The weaker a member is, the more it is indispensable; the more unrepresentable it is, the more it is to be given comeliness.

According to 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul tells us that the basic structure of the church is three classes of people: saints, deacons, and elders. And the elders who rule the church well are to be counted worthy of double honor. This accords with what Paul says, that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. Those saints who faithfully serve the church have no time to look after their own livelihood; the saints in the church willingly and cheerfully offer to God, and then God supplies

those servers who have need — this is a very beautiful thing. Then why did Paul insist on not accepting support from the church in Corinth? Because the church in Corinth did not submit to Paul's authority, Paul would not accept their support, and would rather accept the gifts sent from the church in Philippi, because the church in Philippi had always been of one heart with Paul.

The New Testament church was established through the apostles of the first generation; the apostles, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, did not lay down in writing how a preacher should obtain support, as in the Old Testament God clearly spoke to Aaron. The apostles also did not lay down in writing the organizational structure of the church, but only very roughly put forward such a simple structure of saints, deacons, and elders. Actually this is God's wisdom.

By the time John wrote Revelation, in Revelation chapters 2-3 there were the forms of seven churches. These seven forms of church represent all the churches of the past two thousand years: from the Catholic Church with a unified organizational framework worldwide, to denominations based on a nation, a region, or certain truths, and then to all kinds of free groups. This exactly meets the needs of all kinds of people. Jesus' charge to the disciples before He ascended is in Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

So when Jesus Christ comes again, in every corner of the whole world there will be people testifying for Jesus Christ. Although God uses all kinds of churches to gain the people who belong to Him, yet among the seven forms of church, God still revealed the church that most accords with His heart. Among the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2-3, only two churches receive no rebuke at all from the Lord, only the Lord's praise: the church in Smyrna and the church in Philadelphia.

Smyrna is a suffering church, and Philadelphia is a church where the brothers and sisters love one another. God called me to rise up and serve Him, and to serve the church; the vision God gave me is to take Philadelphia as the pattern. This is a small church that is like a family, where the relationships among the brothers and sisters

are extremely intimate; the church will not be too large, and therefore it also does not need all kinds of complex organizational frameworks. Every saint in the church is to participate in service, and from serving to find his own commission. The saints can then use a lifetime to develop their gift and fulfill their own office. In this way, perhaps when the Lord comes again, He will be able to say to every saint in the church: you are a good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your lord.

The structure of the church follows Paul's teaching: there are only deacons and elders, and no full-time preachers who receive a salary. As for saints who have need, the saints can supply one another. Such a simple structure can spare many troubles in personnel matters. In almost every large church, what takes the most time and most easily gives rise to problems is the arrangement of personnel and the structure of salaries in the church. Returning to the simple structure of the early church can spare many unnecessary difficulties.

Those saints who have a heart's desire to serve can serve while holding a job; if his service develops to the point that he no longer has time to hold a job, he can then resign from his work and serve full time. As for how the church supplies him, the elders can decide. Because the church is like a family, there is no need to list out all kinds of regulations; there only needs to be suitable fellowship. In this way, a saint with such a heart's desire can also learn the pattern of Paul: when there is supply, he does the Lord's work with his whole heart; when there is no supply, he works with his own hands to support himself and the coworkers around him. In this way, he can appreciate why Paul did not use the authority to live from the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 9:17-18, "For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel." Dear brothers and sisters, although today's fellowship is brief, it is the conclusion I have finally drawn from more than fifty years since I was saved, meeting and serving in many different forms of church, and I put it forth to share with the saints. May God continue to keep and bless.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for giving us such a time, to be able to share the vision and framework of the church. You regard the church as the apple of Your eye, and You always nourish and cherish the church. You also use all kinds of different forms of church, so that the gospel may be preached to the ends of the earth, and in every corner of the world there may be people rising up to testify for You. Enlarge our vision, open our hearts, that we may know that the saints who meet in different churches are all our brothers and sisters. We respect the practice of every church; we ask God also to give us spiritual discernment, to know how, in the church I belong to, the service in the church may all accord with the Lord's heart, so that the church I belong to may testify for Christ, and every saint in the church may develop his gift and fulfill his own office. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.