



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Bought with a Price

Reverend Scott Johnson | July 5, 2026 | Exodus 30:11-16

Old Testament Reading

Our Old Testament reading, and this is also our sermon text, is Exodus chapter 30, verses 11 through 17, or 11 through 16. And this is the inerrant, infallible, inspired word of God. So let's give our attention to God's word. The Lord said to Moses, "When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them. Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary. The shekel is 20 gerahs. Half a shekel as an offering to the Lord. Everyone who is numbered in the census from 20 years old and upward shall give the Lord's offering. The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than the half shekel when you give the Lord's offering to make atonement for your lives. You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord so as to make atonement for your lives."

New Testament Reading

And now turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter—this is our New Testament reading, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything. Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then

take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never. Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For as it is written, 'The two will become one flesh,' but he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Does God Care About Numbers?

As Christians, we often tell ourselves when we're thinking about a church—our church or another church—we often tell ourselves that the size of a congregation is not what is most important about a church. Rather, the most important thing for a church is that they are faithful to proclaim the gospel, faithful to worship God according to His word, faithful to serve the Lord as He would have us to serve. So whether a church is big or small, that's the most important thing, is to be faithful. And so, with that in mind, we try to be somewhat indifferent about the numbers of the people in our congregation. And that's all true.

That should be our focus. We should be focused on being faithful to Christ, being faithful to the mission that Christ has given to the church, to make disciples of all nations, and to trust that the Lord, according to His perfect wisdom, according to His sovereign will, He will use a church, His people, a congregation, as He will, as He sees fit.

However, we can also say that biblically God is concerned about numbers. We might even say God is very concerned about numbers. One of the great promises that we have in the scriptures about the salvation that God is bringing about through Christ is that it is his purpose not just to save a few people, not just to save even many people, but to save an incredibly huge amount of people. God's promise to the patriarchs was that their descendants—and as Christians, we are all descendants of the patriarchs—but God's promise to them was that their descendants would be as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore, as numerous as the stars in the heavens. And those are things that are virtually uncountable. Those are expressions that are meant to communicate an unbelievably vast number of people.

And it's not only God's will and purpose that many, many people should be brought into his eternal kingdom, but also throughout the scriptures, we see at various places that it was God's will to number his people, to count his people. Of course, God is omniscient. That means he knows all things. He knows all things perfectly. And so he didn't need the leaders of Israel to carry out a head count for God to know exactly how many people belong to his covenant community. But he called for accounting of his people from time to time, really for the sake of the people themselves. It was important for the people of God to know that God not only had many people in the world who were his worshipers, but also that God knows exactly who they are.

And for example, when the prophet Elijah—you'll remember when he complained to the Lord that there was no one but him, he was the only true prophet, the only true worshiper of the Lord that was left, all the other people of Israel had forsaken God's covenant—the Lord said, "No." He encouraged him. He said, "No, there are yet 7,000 in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal and kissed him." And so even in those dark days of apostasy in the nation of Israel, there were still many, many thousands, in fact, of those who were faithful to the Lord. And Elijah needed to know that. He needed to know that he was not alone.

As Christians, we also need to know that we are not alone. In our world today, we very much feel outnumbered by those who do not know Christ, those who do not worship Him. But at the same time, we need to know that we belong to a huge multitude of redeemed people and that that number is growing day by day as Jesus carries out what he promised to do to build his church.

Our passage this morning is about this very thing. It's about numbers, namely the numbers of people who made up the nation of Israel, which were God's covenant people in the old covenant. And in this passage, the Lord gives directions to Moses on how the leaders of Israel were to carry out a census or a counting of the number of people. And as I said, I believe that part of the census, part of the reason why the Lord made this provision, was to encourage the Israelites. They already would have been encouraged when they considered what they were now. They were no longer this ragtag band of 70 people who fled to Egypt for their own safety, but by the Lord's blessing, 400 years later, they had become a great nation. And so the Lord, by ordering a census, would encourage his people from time to time that they were many.

But as we take a closer look at this passage, we'll see that there are other spiritual lessons that God had embedded in this practice of taking a census of the nations, or of the nation of Israel,

and those lessons are relevant for us today. So as we look at this passage, we'll draw some lessons from it for us today.

Lesson 1: Beware of the Danger of Pride

And the first lesson that we can take from it is this: we need to beware of the danger of pride, the danger of pride. Look at what the Lord says to Moses. So in verse 11 and 12, the Lord said to Moses, "When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them."

So whenever Moses or a future leader or a king of Israel would set out to number the people, they had to collect what is called here a ransom from each person that was counted. Verse 13 tells us that this ransom was half a shekel. Don't think of a shekel, at least in this context, don't think of it as a coin, but it's actually just a weight. It's about two-fifths of an ounce or 11 grams. And we know from other scriptures that what was weighed out, what made up a shekel, was silver. That was the precious metal that was currency. And so every person who was counted in the census had to pay this offering to the Lord of half a shekel of silver. According to one commentator, paying half a shekel for the people of Israel then would be similar to us having to pay a couple hundred dollars or a few hundred dollars today. So it wasn't a fortune, but it wasn't just pocket change either.

In verse 16, we learn that all of the half shekels of silver that were collected in the census, that they would go—or this silver would go to the maintenance of the temple, or the tabernacle rather. In verse 16, it was for the service of the tent of meeting. And so the money would be put to this very important, this very practical use to maintain the tabernacle where the Lord was worshiped.

Verse 14 tells us who was numbered. Verse 14 says, "Everyone who is numbered in the census from 20 years old and upward shall give the Lord's offering." Again, from other Old Testament passages, we know that everyone here is referring to men. Men who were 20 years old and upward. Now, that doesn't mean that women and those who were under the age of 20 were not somehow counted among the people of God. They most certainly were considered by God members of His covenant people, but they were not included in the actual census. We'll see in a

minute there was at least one reason for that, but it was the men who were over 20 years old who were the ones who were actually numbered.

Now, going back to verse 11, notice that the reason why each man who was counted had to pay this half-shekel tax was so, verse 11, "that there be no plague among them when you number them." And so on the surface, on the first reading of verse 11, things appear to be this way, that if the Israelites did not pay this half-shekel ransom when they were counted in the census, that this would trigger God's judgment or bring upon them God's wrath, and that judgment for their failure to pay this tax would be that he would bring upon them some kind of deadly plague. But I believe there's more to this in verse 11 than meets the eye, that there's more to this relationship between the plague that is threatened and the half-shekel offering.

And I say this based on other scripture, what we read about when we read other places in the Old Testament when a census was actually taken, namely when David, when he was king, when he decided to take a census. You'll recall, I think it's from 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, that David, as king, decided that he would take a census of the people of Israel. But this was not a righteous thing that he decided to do. In fact, 1 Chronicles 21 says that Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. Satan, of course, does not incite anybody to do anything that is good or righteous, and so this was, by definition, something that was evil, this idea of David's to take a census. Even Joab, his general, warned David, "Don't do this, don't take the census." But David was stubborn, he did it anyway, and the result was a complete disaster for the people of Israel. The Lord brought a plague upon them, and 70,000 people were destroyed by that plague.

Now, the Bible doesn't spell out for us exactly why David's desire to number the people of Israel was so evil and so wrong, but one clue that we have is when we consider that normally a nation or a king would take a census of his people in order to know how strong he was militarily, maybe even to plan a war. He needed to know how many fighting men he had. And that's why there was only, or it was only men who were 20 years old and upward who were counted in the census because they could serve as soldiers in a war. And so based on that, it seems that David wanted to take the census for the wrong reasons. Perhaps he wanted to simply size up his power as king. How many soldiers do I have underneath me? Or maybe he wanted to glory in the strength of his kingdom. Or perhaps he was preparing for a war that the Lord had not sanctioned. Or maybe David just simply failed to trust in the Lord. He wanted to size up the nation. He was worried about the Lord's protection or provision. Whatever the reason, the

particular census was the result of David's sin. It was not righteous. He did not do it out of a desire to honor God or to give thanks to God or in obedience to God's commandment.

But you'll notice if we had read the passages about David's census that there's nothing in there that suggests that this plague came upon the people of Israel because they failed to pay the half-shekel ransom. I think it's safe to say that throughout history, rulers and governments have not been prone to fail to collect on a tax that they impose on their people. But not only that, Scripture makes it clear that David was guilty before the Lord, even before he actually carried out the census. Again, his sin was wanting to do the census, to do it for the wrong reason.

And so in light of all of that, in our passage this morning, we shouldn't read verse 12 as simply saying that God would bring a plague upon the people of Israel when they took a census if they failed to pay this half-shekel offering. Rather, what verse 12 is saying is that this half-shekel offering was how the Lord would remind the Israelites, the rulers and the people, that taking a census could be a very dangerous thing, that they had to be very careful when they went about to take a census of the people of Israel. It only had to be carried out for the right reasons, for righteous motives. It was not to be taken in order to size up or to bolster one's political or military power or national strength. In other words, the half-shekel ransom and the threat of the plague were cautions built right into the law of taking a census that had to be done for the right reasons. If it wasn't, God would judge the people just as he did under David when he brought a plague upon them.

In this, there is a general principle that we can derive from that that is very much true for you and me as well today as Christians. And that is this, that when God has given us—and God has given all of us—many blessings, many good gifts, good things in this world, when we receive these blessings, when we possess them, when we have them, we are in danger of spiritual pride. And why is that? It's because by nature we either use the blessings that God gives us, the gifts that he gives us, we either use them to inflate our own sense of self-importance, or we use them to fulfill or pursue our own self-centered sinful desires. In other words, we are told often to count our blessings, and that is a good thing, understood correctly. We are to count our blessings, to remember all of the ways that God has been good to us, but we can count our blessings for all the wrong reasons.

Let me share a personal example just to illustrate what I mean. When I meet someone for the first time and we're engaged in the introductory small talk, "What do you do?" and so on, it

comes up pretty quickly, I tell them that I'm a pastor. And oftentimes, that's a conversation stopper right there. But if the person's willing to keep talking, sometimes or often, one of the first questions they'll ask is, "Well, how big is your church?" And of course, what I am hearing that person asking me is, "Just how good of a pastor are you, really? How big is your church?" Of course, I tell them the truth. We have about 1,000 members, not including our three satellite campuses.

But the point is that we as pastors, although we know better, even in our worst moments, we cannot help sometimes that we are tempted to measure the success of our ministry, maybe even to measure our own sense of or to give ourselves a sense of personal worth or validity by the numbers of the people in our church. And so we take a mental census of not only the size of our congregation, but the size of other congregations in our denomination, our presbytery, in the community. And we do it all for the wrong reason, because it's all about our pride.

And in one way or another, we are all guilty of this, of something like this at least. We take a census of this or that to measure our own success, to assure ourselves of our own personal worth. Parents might think, "We've got more kids than that family. We're not only better parents, we may even be better people because we are doing more to be fruitful and multiply than they are." Or we might tell ourselves, "Well, compared to other people, I've got more likes, I've got more followers on social media. I must be pretty special. I must be pretty important." Or maybe you take a census of the dollars that you have in your bank account. Or you size up your GPA. Or you count your accomplishments. Or you take an inventory of how successful you've been in your career. And you do this in order to validate yourself, to make yourself seem better than others. Somehow we think that our significance, our value is measured by how much we've accomplished in this world or how much we have gained in this world. And so we can count our blessings for all the wrong reasons.

What should we do instead? Well, instead we are to give thanks to God. We are to give thanks to God for every good thing that He has given us, whether it's He has blessed us with talents, with success, with whatever. We are to give praise to God because every good gift, every perfect gift comes from above. It comes from the Father of lights. God is the source of every blessing. Every good thing that I possess is from God, not from me. And so, if we do take a census of what we have, if we count our blessings, we should do it only in order to praise and to thank God for His goodness to us.

Lesson 2: Wholehearted Devotion to the Lord

And that brings us to the second lesson, and that is the need for wholehearted devotion to the Lord. Even though I've been referring to the half shekel as a tax, strictly speaking, it wasn't really a tax. You'll notice that in the passage, it's called a ransom. And the idea behind it was not that God was claiming just a small portion of what the Israelites possessed—that would be the idea of a tax. Rather, what's implied in the word ransom is that God was claiming his absolute lordship, his absolute ownership, not only over everything that each Israelite possessed, but over the person of each Israelite as well. And so by calling this a ransom, and when the Israelites had to give it, it was a recognition on the part of the Israelites that they belonged entirely to the Lord. They were the Lord's.

And as a Christian, that is true for you as well. Not only all that you have, all that you are is God's. You belong entirely to Christ. And that's true for two reasons. First of all, you have been created by God. You did not create yourself. You did not come into being of yourself. But it is God who made you, He created you, He sustains you, He gives you life and breath. You are nothing apart from Him. And that's true for all of us. And so we belong to Him because He is our creator. Not only that, but as a Christian, you have been redeemed by Christ, and so you belong to Him because He is your Savior. And so we are doubly owned by God, by creation and by salvation.

1 Corinthians 6 puts it this way—this is the passage that we heard from the New Testament: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." As a Christian, you are not your own. This is such an important fundamental truth that we need to absorb into our hearts and into our thinking. You do not have sovereign rights over your life, over your body, over your time, your talents, your resources, but all things are to be devoted to because they belong to Christ, because you were bought with a price.

Now the Apostle Paul declared this truth in 1 Corinthians that we are not our own. He proclaimed this truth to them in the context of a passage in which he is speaking about sexual immorality. And in our world today, if there is one area in which we must be radically different from the world around us, it is this: in our understanding of sexuality. Because the world tells us the opposite of what the scripture tells us. The world says you are your own. You belong to yourself. You have the sovereign right to use your body in any way that you please with anyone

that you please. But God says this to us: you are not your own. You belong to Christ. And so you must glorify God with your body and use your body in a way that honors him as he has revealed in his word.

And this truth that we belong to Christ, body and soul, this applies to every aspect of life. Our entire being, our entire lives belongs to Him. And so we are to devote our bodies, our minds, all things to the worship, to the service of Jesus Christ, our Lord. And so the second lesson from this passage is a call for wholehearted devotion to the Lord.

Lesson 3: The Nature of Our Salvation

The third lesson is this: this passage speaks to the nature of our salvation. The half shekel is not only called a ransom in this passage, but it's also called, in verse 16, atonement money. And the half shekel was to be offered by the Israelites, according to verse 15, to make atonement for your lives. Now, of course, the money itself did not atone for their sins, but it was a token of the atonement that God had provided for them ultimately in Christ, but also through the sacrifices, in a sacramental way, through the sacrifices that they offered.

And so by calling the half shekel offering both a ransom and atonement money, this money that was given to the Lord during the census, it would have impressed upon the minds of the Israelites a far greater reality than just the fact that they were about to be counted. And that is, as Israelites, as the people of God, they were those whom the Lord had redeemed. He had redeemed them with a ransom, and that redemption was based on an atonement, an atonement that was accomplished by the shedding of blood, by the sacrifice of blood.

And the Old Testament uses the ideas of redemption and ransom and atonement and blood sacrifice to describe the work of God's salvation for his people, because it was all pointing towards the greater sacrifice by which the coming Christ, the Messiah, would bring salvation to his people, because it would be a redemption based on the sacrifice of his own body, the sacrifice of himself. The Christ, when he came into the world, would offer himself as the Lamb of God, an atonement to cover the sins of the people of God.

And that is exactly what we need. We are in desperate need of an atonement, a blood sacrifice to cleanse us, to take away our guilt and our sin, because we are in bondage to sin by nature. By nature, we are captives to sin, and the only ransom that can save us is the death of Jesus

Christ, his blood shed upon the cross. Psalm 49:7 says, "Truly no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life." And that is true, but Jesus is the exception to that rule because he is not just man, but when he united his sinless divinity, his deity, with true humanity, he became the God-man. And He is the one who can ransom sinners such as you and me from our bondage to sin and death. He is the only one who can do that.

And Jesus said that is exactly why He came from heaven into the earth, into our world. Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." And so God sent his son to us in order to offer himself as this sacrifice by his suffering, his death, the blood that he shed upon the cross. There is forgiveness of sins. There is cleansing. There is eternal life. There is redemption.

And the question that this impresses upon us is this, and I'll ask this question to you. Have you come to Jesus Christ by faith? Have you repented of your sins? Have you put your trust in the Son of God as the only one who can bring salvation to you, as the only one through whom there is forgiveness, the gift of eternal life? And if you have, you belong to Christ and you are counted. You are counted among the redeemed people of God.

We've often heard the expression, "The devil's in the details." Well, when it comes to the scriptures, it's often God and his grace that are in the details. And there's a wonderful detail in this passage that we need to notice in verse 15. Let me read verse 15 to you. Notice the egalitarianism here: all the Israelites, whether they were rich, whether they were poor, whether they were great, whether they were lowly, they were all redeemed by the very same purchase price, this half shekel. And what that means is that in the sight of God, not one of his redeemed people is more valuable or worthy than any other. In the case of the Israelites, they were all redeemed by the same amount, by the same price.

And what this means for you and me is this: is that God places the very same worth and value upon each one of His beloved children. Every single person who belongs to Jesus Christ, every single one was purchased by Christ with the same blood that He shed upon the cross. Every single one who belongs to Jesus Christ has been loved with the same divine love of the Father from all eternity. And so there is no one in the church, there is no one among God's people who is inherently more valuable or more important or more worthy than anybody else.

And let me ask you another question. Do you see your brother or sister in Christ as just as worthy and valuable as you are in the sight of God? And not only that, but do you treat them that

way? Do you treat your fellow Christians as though they are equal in value, importance, and worth as you consider yourself to be as one who has been loved by Christ?

The Greatest Census is Yet to Come

Well, the greatest census of God's redeemed people is yet to come. There are various—I don't know what the plural of census is, but there were various times when the people had a census taken in the Bible. But the greatest one is yet to come. And that will be on that day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. And every single one of his beloved people will be raised up from the grave, from death, with bodies that are immortal, incorruptible, imperishable, and glorious forever and ever. And there will be such a vast number of people who have been redeemed in Christ, who are raised up in glory, that they will be literally uncountable by us.

That's exactly what John tells us in his vision that he gives us in Revelation. In Revelation 7:9, he sees a great multitude that no one could number. No one but God, that is. No one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb. And the promise that God gives to you as a believer in Jesus Christ, as one who has come to your Savior in faith, that if you are numbered among God's people today, if you belong to Jesus Christ by faith today, you will be numbered among God's people on that great day as well.

And why is that? It's not because of how great your faithfulness is. It's not because of how strong your will is to persevere. It's because of the ransom that Jesus Christ paid for you and the greatness of that ransom, that His blood shed upon the cross, the blood of the Son of God of infinite value and worth. It is sufficient to cover all your sins, all your sins. And so death has no more claim on you. You are no longer subject to the condemnation, the wrath of God. Your sins are forgiven. You have been redeemed by the grace of Jesus Christ and that forever and ever.

On that great day, the words that Jesus spoke will be proven true. Jesus said in John chapter 18, "Of those whom you gave me, I have lost not one." And so the great census taker will see on that day that everyone whom he loved, everyone for whom he died will be with him in glory for all eternity.

Let's pray.