

# ***“I’m So Over This”***

Robert M. Thompson, Pastor

**Corinth Reformed Church**  
150 Sixteenth Avenue NW  
Hickory, North Carolina 28601  
828.328.6196 [corinthtoday.org](http://corinthtoday.org)

*(© 2020 by Robert M. Thompson. Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures quoted are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright 2011 by New York International Bible Society.)*

***In the midst of a tiring world of uncertainty, what’s going on in your soul?***

***Numbers 16:1-7***

***October 11, 2020***

(Available in print form at [corinthtoday.org/sermons](http://corinthtoday.org/sermons) or by audio at 828.328.6196.)

## ***Out of control***

If you were watching Corinth services online back in April, you may recall that our daughter Jeni and her husband Matt had to scale down their wedding to ten people at a park – a sweet ceremony moved 100 yards or so because of a rude intrusion.

The formal wedding happened last weekend, and I’m happy to report no barking dogs and no one insulting my wife. Jeni texted the next day and said she was still reminiscing about a “perfect day.” It was. We still reduced the guest list to about half, but it was a special celebration in so many ways.

I had met the owner of the wedding venue two days before the ceremony, and (as officiant and FOB) peppered her with questions about COVID protocols. Her answer, in a few words: “I only rent the venue. Ask the wedding planner. I’m so over this.”

I’m hearing a lot of that these days. What are you “so over”? The pandemic? The elections? Zoom? Whatever your “wilderness” is? By “wilderness” I mean anything from grief to pain to delay to aimless wandering to loneliness to frustration – with yourself or with others. It’s when you’re out of control and you’re just “done” trying to fix it. You’ve tried. What next?

In Numbers 16, a group of Israelites, led by a man named Korah, are “so over it.” We don’t know exactly when in the wilderness journey this happened. We don’t know because it doesn’t really matter. Pastor Paul and Pastor Amy preached last week about the 40-year delay for the Israelites after ten spies brought back a terrifying report.

## ***Separated into community***

If this story feels familiar, there's a reason. We've already had multiple incidents of grumbling and complaining. It's characteristic of this season in Israel's story. But this one is a little different. In Numbers 11, for example, the murmuring started on the edge of the camp with the "rabble" – non-Israelites who had chosen to escape Egypt with the Israelites when they had a chance. The way the camp was arranged (according to Numbers 2-3), the spread of discontent in Numbers 11 was from the outside in.

This time it's from the inside out. We learn that the instigators are Kohathites and Reubenites. Those names might not mean anything to you, but it would be like saying a coup in America started with the Secret Service and members of the Trump family. This rebellion is an inside job. The Kohathites, a sub-tribe of Levites, were responsible for "the care of the most holy things" in the tabernacle (Numbers 4:4). They were given explicit duties for covering tabernacle furnishings with a blue cloth before transporting them. The Kohathites were never to handle or even look at them or they would die (Numbers 4:20).

Camped next to the Kohathites were the Reubenites, descendants of Jacob's oldest son who had lost his privileged status through adultery (Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4). The Reubenites apparently resented the authority of Moses and Aaron. By blood or by marriage, all the ring leaders of this rebellion were related to Moses and Aaron. Let's trace briefly what happens in this chapter.

*Everybody's blue (1-3).* Korah, the ring leader of the rebellion, recruits not only some Reubenites but 250 others to confront Moses and Aaron. They are "well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council" (2). They should have known better.

Verse 1 ends in the NIV, "...became insolent." Literally the text says they "took..." without a direct object. Took what? Took whom? They just "took." They took action, took initiative, took control.

"You have gone too far!" they said to Moses and Aaron. Literally, "Too much, y'all!" They continue, "The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" Note the words "holy" and "assembly." They're the key to the passage.

There's a half-truth here, of course. In Numbers 15, every Israelite was told to wear blue tassels on the corners for their robes. Blue was the first synthetic pigment in the ancient world, and the Israelites had apparently either brought quantities of this dye with them or had learned from Egyptians how to manufacture it. Blue was the color of holiness, draped by Kohathites over the holy things and worn symbolically by all Israelites. Blue to Israel was then and remains today a national color – the same way Americans use "red, white, and blue." Blue was the color of being set apart, together.

“Everybody’s blue,” Korah is saying to Moses and Aaron flanked by Reubenites and others, “but you think you’re the bluest. Too much to y’all!” In word we might use, “Why do you think you’re ‘holier than thou’? Why are you more separated than others?”

*God separates (4-11).* Moses plants his face in the ground – whether before this group of rebels or before God we’re not told. He realizes there are others who have been coerced or persuaded to join the complaint, but at the heart of it this is a group of Levites challenging Aaron’s role as high priest. Whereas in Egypt Aaron was the mouthpiece for Moses before Pharaoh, now Moses is going to speak for Aaron. Moses’ key points –

- Moses will trust God to validate God’s choices (5).
- Korah and “followers” will have a chance to do the work of priests (6-7).
- The LORD is the One who separates priests from the community (8-10).
- The rebels are opposing God, not Aaron (11).

Surely Korah and the others remember what happened in Leviticus 10, when two of Aaron’s sons “offered unauthorized fire,” and died in a fire from God. Moses is saying to this new group, “Are you SO sure the LORD has called you that you will put God on the spot in front of all?” We might also remember Elijah’s challenge on Mt. Carmel centuries later, but this is not the LORD vs. Baal. This is internal – which Levites have God’s approval.

*No!* (12-15) Moses turns to the co-conspirators, the Reubenites. He summons them to the tabernacle, but they refuse: “No!” Their complaint is not religious; it’s political. It’s not about Aaron; it’s about Moses. They make no mention of God – his guidance or his miracles. They blame Moses for bringing them from “a land flowing with milk and honey” and failing to deliver on a promise of a new and fertile home. They hurl the ultimate insult – that Moses is their new Pharaoh, a slave master. That makes Moses “very angry.” He asks God not to accept their offering.

*Separate!* (16-27). Moses now turns back to Korah. “You and all your followers,” he says, “are to appear before the LORD tomorrow.” Every single one of the 250 who has challenged the priesthood of Aaron is to bring a censer and appear at the tabernacle. The next day they do, and the glory of the LORD appears.

God tells Moses and Aaron, “Separate yourselves from the entire assembly. I’ll judge every one of them.” Moses and Aaron intercede. It’s a beautiful picture of the privilege and responsibility of leadership. Sometimes you fall down, sometimes you push back, sometimes you’re angry, but ultimately the pattern of leaders in the Bible is to intercede for God’s mercy and his patience.

“OK, then,” the LORD answers. “Tell the rest of the people to separate from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.” Interestingly, the Hebrew here is actually singular – “the tent of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.” This is also not the usual word for “tent.”

This word is never used in the Bible of a human dwelling. It's quite possible they have already set up their rival tabernacle.

Remember, the dwellings of the Kohathites and Reubenites are in close proximity. As Moses addresses Korah and the 250, Dathan and Abiram the Reubenites, who had refused to join them earlier, emerge from their dwellings with their wives and children. The stage is set for the epic, public competition. Whose "fire" will God accept.

*Created creation (28-40).* Moses now makes a dramatic speech. He says, "If these men die a natural death, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the death, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt."

The phrase "brings about something totally new" translates "creates a creation." The "realm of the dead" is Sheol. The ground opens and swallows the ringleaders and all their people and possessions. Some suggest this could have been a natural phenomenon – either an earthquake or something akin to quicksand in a marsh. That's possible, but this is far more than a natural phenomenon in its limitation and its timing.

And it's not over. Fire also blazes against the rest of the 250 men and consumes them and their offering. Then the bronze censers are hammered into an additional veneer over the altar as a perpetual reminder of what happened that day.

*Plus, a plague (41-50).* Perhaps the most surprising turn in this story is that the entire community rises up against Moses and Aaron the next day: "You have killed the LORD's people." Seriously? Moses and Aaron did this? God sends a plague and once again Moses and Aaron intercede to stop the plague. It feels like God himself is "so over this" – over their habitual unbelief and disobedience. 14,700 die, making the total number of deaths in this sad chapter about 15,000.

What led to all this? They were "so over it." They were tired of the wilderness. Weary of the uncertainty and fear. Used to the pillar of fire and cloud. Sick of the rules and the smell of sacrifices. Done with Moses and Aaron. Done with their assigned place in the community with no chance for advancement. So over it.

### **Choices**

Where are you "so over it"? COVID stats? Masks? Social distancing? Trump v. Biden? Cunningham v. Tillis? Debates? Hurricanes and fires? Racial justice? News? Social media? Isolation? Online worship? Uncertainty over where you go to school or work? The Coronian? Rules or lack of respect for rules? Lack of control of your life?

You have choices when you're "so over it." You might think you don't have choices, that whatever your thoughts and words and actions they're just a produce of

being “so over it,” and you can’t help it. Everybody’s human, you know. And besides, it’s just what people do and say when they’re so over it.

The Apostle Paul says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). Giving up is not what people do who have been transformed by the Gospel, by the One who never gave up in his mission of rescue and redemption.

Stop making excuses. You have choices. The world around you may not have any choice but to fit in with how people act when they’re frustrated. You have the Holy Spirit. You’ve been changed by Christ. You have a choice whether to listen to the flesh or the Spirit. Let’s be more specific. What are the lessons here?

*Trust God’s word and work.* In the wilderness, especially when it stretches from days to weeks to years, it’s easy to develop spiritual amnesia. It’s easy to forget who God is and what he’s done. We look at these Israelites and see dramatic moments where they had seen God at work. We wonder how they could challenge Moses time after time after time. He’s the plague guy, the guy who raised his staff and the sea parted, the one whose encounters with God created audio-visual effects – fire, earthquake, glory-cloud. How could they think Moses is not God-appointed?

It’s easy to try to turn stories in this part of the Bible into a condemnation of God or of the writers of Scripture. “That’s not my kind of God – who would kill 15,000 people!” Be careful of putting God in the dock, as C. S. Lewis said. Putting God on trial. These stories are in the Bible specifically because they are memorable and dramatic. They are warnings, Paul tells us. They happened to what feels like excess from our perspective so that the lessons will never be forgotten.

The big lesson is God’s sovereignty and goodness must be trusted. God must be trusted in his delays and our disappointments. God’s word must be trusted – that he means what he says. God’s work must be trusted because he’s God and we’re not. It’s the theological foundation for not being “weary in well-doing.” Are you “so over” life right now that you’ve stopped going to God, stopped resting in him, stopped trusting that what is happening in the world – or in your world – he will turn to your good?

*Beware of half-truths.* Half-truths had been seeded into the hearts of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and 250 others. While it is true that the whole community is holy, it’s not the whole truth. Within the community God had separated leaders and priests. Not every role is for everyone. Everybody can’t lead – politically or spiritually. In New Testament terms we speak of the “gifts of the Spirit” in the “body of Christ.” The hand is not the eye, but the hand can’t say to the eye, “I don’t need you.”

Now is the season in America for half-truths. Like it or not, it’s become part of our political system. Every two to four years, for reasons I can’t take time to explain and am not sure that I would be able to anyway, our televisions and newspapers and social

media become dominated by half-truths. And I can tell you which ones you're likely to despise – they're the ones that come from the opposite side of the political aisle – and which ones you're likely to excuse – the ones that come from those you want to win or from people you otherwise like.

I don't need to try to fix a political system today. That's not my goal. My question today is what is the "season for half-truths" doing to your soul as a believer, and how is the season for half-truths affecting you? Are you believing and even spreading half-truths because everybody's doing it, maybe even to counter the half-truths of others? Vote your conscience, get involved in the system, speak your convictions, but don't fall prey to half-lies and half-truths – even in politics.

More critically, has the acceptability of half-truths in politics or culture made half-truths more acceptable when it comes to the Gospel or the Bible? That God loves everybody and therefore everybody is OK as is with God? That God just wants you to be happy? That God's grace covers all our sins so we can just keep sinning?

*Finally, self-check your heart.* In the midst of a frustrating, tiring world of uncertainty, what's going on inside of you? As you consider the positions or behaviors of others, check for pride and condescension. Check for envy and jealousy. Check for selfishness and greed.

There's actually a relatively simple stethoscope for the human heart. It's the level of complaining and grumbling – sometimes to others, sometimes to God, sometimes just inside your head. Are you complaining or grumbling more lately?

The life verse I chose as a teenager is Philippians 2:15-16. It's about holding forth the word of life and shining as lights in the world. It's actually the middle of a sentence. I've always wanted my life to shine for Jesus. I want to make Jesus attractive.

The first part of the sentence wasn't part of my "life verse." Maybe because I was a teenager? This is actually the "to do" part: "Do everything without grumbling and complaining" (14). Paul, I'm sure, has in mind those Israelites who grumbled and complained repeatedly and incessantly and illogically in the middle of the wilderness.

And sometimes – no, often – that grumbling and complaining inside bubbled up through half-truths into outright rebellion against God's word and his work. That's the major takeaway from Numbers 16. Don't let that happen. And Paul says the reason we can't let it happen is because it dulls the light of Christ shining into a crooked generation. If we are the ring leaders of discontent – even if we think we're standing up for the truth – it just makes Jesus less attractive to the world around us.

Trust God's word and his work. Beware of half-truths. Self-check your heart. That way you can shine the light of Jesus in a world that so desperately needs him, now more than ever. Amen.