

“Choose Faith Over Fear”

Numbers 13

Sometimes our minds replay events or decisions we made in the past that we wish we could do over. Things we did and decisions we made or words we said that made a big difference on the future path that stood before us. We said no when we should have said yes. We said yes, when we should have said no. We opened our mouths when we should have closed them or we kept our mouths closed when we should have opened them. And why did we do what we wished we hadn't? Often out of fear. Fear of failing. Fear of losing some-thing or someone or thinking we were gaining when we ended up paying in the end. Maybe we still taste the bitter results of that poor decision.

Choices we all make them. Many good, hopefully only a few bad. But some choices change the direction of our life; positively or negatively. Numbers 13-14 is all about choices. Ten people make poor choices which affects an entire nation for a whole generation. And two people make good choices that directs their life in a godly way.

But God can still use us in spite of our poor choices, to reshape us into His image and to impact others for His good. And He loves to bless our good choices that seek His glory over our own comfort and fears. In talking about the exodus and Israel's 40 years in the wilderness, the apostle Paul wrote this for us 1 Cor. 10:11:

¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

So let's learn the lesson this morning from the past to choose faith over fear.

The grumbling incidents of Ch's 11 and 12 are behind us but it's still lying under the surface and takes very little effort to rise again, which we'll see. Geographically, the Israelites have moved closer to Canaan:

¹⁶ After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran.

Let's see where they were and where they were going [show map]. Moving north from Hazeroth, coming through the desert of Paran they make their way towards the land of Canaan, go through the middle of the land, going as far north as Rehob and Hammath [show map 2] and then return to meet with Moses at Kadesh Barnea in the south. This took 40 days.

The first 16 verses give us the names of the 12 spies. When compared with the list of the tribal leaders back in Num. 1, these are different names. Probably 12 younger men who they felt were skilled, could handle themselves in case they got in trouble and could be trusted to tell them what was there. God commanded Moses for this to happen. And if God commands us or asks His people to do something we must trust that ...

God Enables & Equips Us When He Calls Us to Obey **(13:1-25)**

When God chooses us to serve Him, He is going to give us what we need to do His will. We should then be encouraged to do and what He says not afraid to do. In essence,

God partners with us (vv.1-16)

Right from when we are first saved, God gives us the seal of His Spirit. The Spirit comes into our lives and equips us with gifts to do God's work. God chooses us to accomplish His will. This is a great illustration of the divine-human partnership that God wants with us. What's God's plan to reach the world with the gospel? He entrusts us with his Word. Paul explains this perfectly in Romans 10 when he tells us in v.17 that

¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

But he also said earlier

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

God's plan back here was 'I am giving the land of Canaan to the Israelites' but He also tells them to go see what the land is like, who is there, what kind of defenses they have and whether the land is good or not. Why? Because yes God is giving them the land but they have to act in faith and take it over, which means battles. God already prepared them for this when He organized them into fighting units and had them count how many soldiers they would have.

So God partners with His people to do His work. If He wants us to do something for Him, He will equip us and enable us. 40 years later, when Joshua is going to take them in again, God reminds him of this in Josh. 1:6

⁶ "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

But 10 men whose names are recorded for all history, will not believe God will work through them. "These are their names" (v.4) and another "these are their names" in v.16. Two of these names we all know but the others are lost to us. But not to God and not to the eternal record of Scripture. These 10 men caused an entire nation to not trust God. It's not like God didn't prepare them properly. He told them and He warns us in His Word

God informs us that we will be challenged (vv.17-19, 21-22)

Through Moses we learn that these 12 spies will need to see whether the cities are fortified and well populated because if they are, it will mean there will be a battle to overtake them. They are also asked to check out the land whether its good or bad. There's a lot of desert areas and mountains in Israel, not conducive to agriculture. But there are also valleys and streams which will have fertile land.

God tells us that life will not always be easy. So for us to think that God's plan for us is to give us a pain free and comfortable life doesn't line up with Scripture. That will happen one day after this life ends. This is why we're going to have a new earth because this one groans (Paul says in Rom. 8) because of the impact of sin. However,

God promises blessings to us when we persevere (vv.20, 23-25)

God told them the land did have areas of good soil and fruit on it – we're told it was grape season and many times we're told it was the land of milk and honey. That doesn't mean it was wet and sticky everywhere but that the land produced vegetation for cattle who produce milk (what we need regularly) and bees who produce honey, which is sweet and gives strength. But in order to reap the benefits of that land you have to believe God will give it to you as you persevere in battle and doing the hard work of planting and sowing. God never tells us we're getting a work-free, hardship-free life. He warns us it will have it's challenges but if we believe God's Words are true and act on them, we will see and receive many blessings from God. Our needs will be met.

So they go. They are gone for 40 days. Moses and the people wait for their return and now we get the much-anticipated report:

²⁶ They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. ²⁸ But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan."

While the report about the land is initially good, v.28 begins with the word 'But' or 'nevertheless' or 'however' or 'moreover'. The differences in the English translations are because no one single word can translate this drastic, negative concept. It means 'yet to the very opposite of what we just said'. And that turns everyone's minds away from God's blessing. Israel needed then, as we all do now, to

Trust God's Word and Power for the Next Victory **(13:26-33)**

We have to step back at this point and recall how they got where they were. God used 10 miraculous plagues to show the Egyptians and Israelites that there is only One God in the world. He rescued 2 million slaves from Egypt. He parted a sea for them to cross on dry ground. He then gave them His laws in stone. He provided water where there was no water. He gave them manna every morning. They had seen sign after signs of God's power. His every Word had come true. Keep trusting that His Word will come true in the land and that He will give it to the and empower them to defeat their enemies. They lost focus and we do too. When facing challenges to trust God we have to ...

Focus on what's true (vv.26-27, 30)

God told them to bring back some of the produce and it was grape season and it took two men to carry such a huge bunch of grapes. This sounds fictional and then I googled it and I found this picture from Israel [show slide]. Here is an example of what is there. Physical evidence of what the land could yield. It does flow with milk and honey. And Caleb shouts in v.30,

³⁰ Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

Caleb focuses on what God says and what they are capable of doing if they trust God to help them get the land. God said He would give them the land. He told them there would be challenges.

He said it was a good land. But they focus not on what is true and fixate on what isn't true. We all need to ...

Stop fixating on what isn't true (vv.28-29, 31-33)

Yes, their enemies were there. God never said they weren't there. Israel failed to trust God. Caleb said 'we can' ...

³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."

But so were the Egyptians and God gave you victory over them. Instead of remembering the past victories of God in their life when faced with the next challenge, they fixate on the current problems, not the truth. In their fear of doing God's will, the 10 spies lie.

³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

The word for 'bad report' has the idea of whispering rumours. It's a lie meant to cause people to fear and to agree with them. The damaging report paints all the inhabitants as giants compared to the Israelites. The reference to Nephilim may simply refer to large people or it's part of the ruse to say those weird creatures mentioned in Gen. 6 of this mixed race of demons and humans are back! If that's the case, it's a clear lie, since these were destroyed in the flood. And if that was their point, someone should have said that to show how ridiculous that was. But if enough people believe a lie and spread it, then the masses fall for it all the time.

And what results? Fear wins out over faith.

^{14:1} That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! ³ Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

It's easy to throw these Israelites under the bus but we all know we too have let fear win over faith. Their complaint is very dangerous; one we should work hard to avoid.

Don't Let Fear Cause You to Forget the Goodness of God **(14:1-4)**

They have forgotten the blessings of God and the way he had miraculously led them so far. They did not believe He could get them through the next challenge even though He had gotten them through challenge after challenge. "All the people" and "all the Israelites" and "the whole assembly" wish they had died in Egypt, forgetting that the desert was a temporary delay while God wanted to see if they were going to trust Him. They did not because they fixated on lies, which caused them to worry about losing their wives and children. They say that their life before God was better.

Life is never better without God (vv.1-3)

Maybe you've faced numerous challenges in your life after you accepted Christ. When we disagree with the majority of the world we will be mistreated and even lied about. We'll be viewed as the threat, the curse against them. Life is never better without God. To have God in your life is the greatest thing that can happen to you.

In Ps. 73, Asaph, Israel's worship leader, the Chris Tomlin or Bill Gaither of his day, was fixated on unsaved people around him and he complained to God that the those who don't have God have better lives than those who do. Because he was so prominent to the people of God, he did not voice these concerns out loud because he says in 73:13

¹³ Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak 10thus," I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰ As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

Living without God here ends with life without God forever. People will exist but in darkness and pain for all eternity. No joy. No hope. No light. No God. Having life here is all God's grace. It's His gift to us to find out that this won't satisfy us but only He can. The people said they should choose a different leader – because Moses follows God and we don't want to follow God – and go back to slavery. What they will discover is that,

Life is directionless if we reject God's words (v.4)

God promised He will get them in the land and give them the land. God was giving them a direction, a purpose, a goal, the satisfaction of a joy-filled life based on obedience to God's Words. But they rejected God's words and for the next 39 years they will wander aimlessly. And yet, God was still gracious enough to send them manna every day, and make sure their shoes never wore out and provided water when they needed it so that the next generation when it was their turn to go in, trusted God, saw God provide and do miracles and get them in.

We began the message talking about regrets and poor choices. Sometimes God gives us another chance later in life but it still requires faith. And the decision-making process always has some element of fear about it. Whenever we say yes to God we say no to something or someone else. Choosing to do what God wants will allow us to oppose someone and disappoint someone. But obedience brings joy into our life, a joy that can't be explained because it's so overwhelming. Jesus said in

John 15:10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

I don't know what decision faces you right now. Maybe you've been disobeying God and have a hard decision to make but are afraid of losing someone or something. Don't let fear hinder your faith. Obey God's Words and trust Him to show you His blessing in His time and way.

Maybe you disobeyed God a long time ago and don't know how to go forward. Confess it, ask His forgiveness, share this with someone you trust and pray with that person that God will give you another chance or show you the direction you need to go.

And maybe you've never really given your life to Jesus Christ and have been enjoying the generic blessings of life He gives to us all, but still think your life is better without God. Don't be fooled. This life has an expiry date. If you don't want God in your life, then when life ends God will give you exactly what you wanted.

Israel experienced the goodness of God many times and in many ways. Yet they let their fears blind them to His goodness for them in the future. So when it's Joshua's turn, God reminded him,

Josh. 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it... Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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