

“Do All for the Glory of God”

Numbers 14:5-45

There are names in the Bible that are memorable for all the wrong reasons. Just saying them brings their evil deeds to attention. Like Jezebel and Ahab, Judas, Haman, Delilah, and Herod. There are 10 other names in Numbers 13 that are listed who may not have the same notoriety as the others I mentioned, nor were they necessarily wicked people. But they joined together to persuade the entire nation of Israel to doubt the goodness and holiness of God. And so God saw to it that their names are immortalized in the bible.

It's not that they were necessarily terrible people but that they shamed the name of God even though they had seen the shekinah glory of God every day since He led them out of Egypt. Can you imagine seeing the visible presence of God every day by a cloud, in a very hot sunny area and every night by a pillar of fire when things get dark and cool. And they saw His miracles and powerful hand and heard every promise He made come true so far. But when they saw big men and walled cities they got scared and doubted God's ability to do what he said He would do. That's called faithlessness.

Faithlessness is When We Fail to Trust Words **(14:5-9)**

Ch. 14 is the aftermath of the lies of the 10 spies, who gave a bad report [spread evil rumour] that the land would be their end not their new beginning. In vv.1-4 the whole nation is now ready to stone Aaron and Moses who hit the dirt in v.5. They believe God's words so much that they know God is going to do something about this. They don't go down because they are afraid of the people, they go down because they are afraid for the people.

God takes faithlessness seriously, especially in His own people, because we know better. Faithlessness is when we fail to believe God's words

Even when the evidence is before us (vv.5-7)

While Moses and Aaron are anticipating God's appearance, God delays and gives the people one more chance to change their minds through the appeal of Caleb and Joshua, who also went into the land and saw the same things but believed God's words that promised them they would have the land and they would defeat their enemies.

They appeal to the people, urging them to think about what they saw – just as God said. They had come so far together. They had seen firsthand the evidence of the One true God who loved them and would do anything for them; they just had to have faith and trust God will do what He said.

They tore their clothes as a visible sign of mourning over sin – not their own but the people's – and pleaded with them,

“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

Caleb and Joshua remind all God's people of an important fact, that

Obedience pleases God (vv.8-9)

In Egypt, God went ahead of the people and performed all those plagues on the Egyptians. It wasn't until the 10th plague which the people had to act on faith and spread the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts. And then at the Red Sea, Moses told the people to watch what God would do – part the Red Sea – but they still had to walk through by faith that it was really happening. God gave them water when they cried out to Him. He gave them manna, which required faith on their part. So, numerous examples of God promising something, He would do it and they responded in faith.

But here, they don't believe God's words because they don't act on faith.

If we're honest, we have moments of faithlessness and doubt. We worry about our needs even though Jesus says don't worry about your needs. And we too have seen the evidence of God meeting our needs or resolving a problem or reconciling a relationship many times in our life. Yet, when the next challenge comes, we fail to believe God will come through. God doesn't leave us. God has us in His hand. We're told to cast our cares on Him because He cares for us. When we fail to do that we show we don't believe He cares for us, even if we say we believe it.

Faithlessness leads to poor choices. And now the Israelites are picking up rocks to kill Moses and Aaron – as if they are the problem. And God appears in His glory. What does He do when His people are faithless?

**God Displays Mercy and Justice When We Disobey
(14:10-38)**

God's awesome glory visibly moves over the Tent of Meeting, marking that He is going to communicate something. God uses the lament language of the psalmists who cry to God 'How long?' when we are suffering, to essentially say, How long must I suffer from faithless, ungrateful followers? He threatens to wipe them all out and start over through Moses. We're not told how God was going to do that since Moses was 80 – not that He couldn't – but repopulating an entire nation would take time. However, perhaps this was a test for Moses. Moses is growing in humility. He interceded for Aaron and Miriam in Ch. 12. Will he intercede for the people – he does! Moses said wiping them out won't glorify You, God – it would make the focus be on Moses. Perhaps this was a test for Moses to see whether he would want an entirely new nation but Moses says, 'No, this is about You.' And he pleads with God saying, if You wipe them all out, the message the rest of the world gets about You is that You are a weak God. So God relents and

He shows mercy so more people will see His glory (vv.10-20)

Moses prays that God's power would be great – how? By showing mercy. He quotes what God told Him about Himself when Moses asked to see God's glory in Ex. 34. In essence, Moses says, 'You're not a merciless God, you're a faithful God who keeps His promises even though You also deal justly.

The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.' ¹⁹ In

accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.

The guilty will be punished and their families will suffer the consequences of this great sin but that's because You love them and forgive them and will bring them into the land. And God does forgive them in v.20.

Sometimes we think, 'God why don't You wipe out all those bad people in the world?' The answer is, wiping them out depicts God as vindictive and doesn't bring Him glory. Letting many of them live displays His glory, through grace and mercy.

² Pet. 3:8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

When the Day of the Lord comes it will come unexpectedly – but it will come. In the meantime everyone is experiencing grace and mercy so that you will repent and put your hope in God, because everything on earth that we are tempted to put our hope in will one day be gone.

So God's sparing Israel here reveals His glory, His love and power and faithfulness to His promises. But He does deal justly too. Why?

He deals justly when His glory is rejected (vv.21-23, 24-29, 32-37)

²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, ²² not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— ²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

Can you imagine seeing the visible evidence of God's glory everyday and then lying to people about His power and His love. To spread an evil report that God can't get them in the land, is to reject God's glory and power (even though they saw it many times). That word for "treated with contempt" is translated differently in almost every translation, because you can't just define it with one word. It basically means blasphemy.

So He deals justly with the 10 spies who spread lies [literally, blasphemies] about Him and tells the rest to go back in the wilderness for 40 years. Over that 40 years all the men old enough to fight will die but their children will inherit the land. V. 34 sums it up:

³⁴ For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.' ³⁵ I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die."

Yet He loves to bless those who live for His glory (vv.24, 30, 38)

Joshua and Caleb will see and enter the land of Canaan. Their survival will act as a witness for 40 years just as much as the slow deaths of all the men 20 years and older for 40 years. So while the justice of the deaths of all these men remind Israel of their faithlessness, the survival and thriving

health of Caleb and Joshua was an encouragement that your children will get in with them. It will still happen. The promises are just delayed.

So God's people have to choose whether they will be faithless or faithful. And some of the men repent and ask forgiveness and tell Moses, 'Okay. We hear. We're going to go in.' And Moses warns them don't do it. God's not with you now. That door is closed for now. You can't just fix huge sins with one act of obedience. So let's make better choices and

Choose to Live for God's Glory Today **(14:39-45)**

These Israelite men waited too long to trust God. The reason they wanted to go now was because they didn't like this 40-year desert cruise, which most would not finish. But

There are consequences when we don't obey (vv.39-45)

Choose to trust God when He gives us opportunities and open doors. Moses tells them "obeying" God now is too late. Now this is disobedience because now you reject what he says about His punishment for you.

Nevertheless in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord's covenant moved from the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

They think they can make a quick fix here and God will change His mind. No, their sin was a slap in God's face. They saw His glory; they saw miracle after miracle. They didn't believe God could do what He said, maybe because they knew it required more effort and trust on their part.

Living by faith requires waiting on God because we can't do anything. So we pray and wait for God to show us where He's working. But living by faith will also mean acting on what we believe God says. These 10 spies chose not to act on what God said and what they had seen God do. And their sin had broader consequences that resulted in the entire nation having to spend 40 years in the wilderness. But after the 40 years were over, the nation was ready. Because they had grown in their faith and knew that their children would receive the promises of God if they acted in faith. And when we read Joshua we do not sense any rebellion on the nations' part. They learned to

Trust God when His blessings are delayed (Josh. 1:16-18)

God's chastisement can result in losing out on current blessings because of our faithlessness, but it doesn't have to mean we lose out completely on blessings. Because if we repent and obey God, He can still work through us and bless.

Have we ever given any thought when we open up Joshua, why the people were all for going into the land and trusted God to lead them through Joshua? And obey Him even when it sounded unusual. Like, step in the Jordan first and then I'll part it and dry it up. Or march around these walls for 6 days silently and on the 7th day blow trumpets and walls will come down?

Josh. 1:16 Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he

was with Moses. ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

It would appear that this new generation has learned from the sins of the past. Rather than wallow in bitterness and grumble *'If it wasn't for the sins of someone else my life would be a lot better'*, they learned to be faithful to God and His Word believing that when those 40 years were over, God was going to do something amazing and they wanted to be part of it. Even if it meant going to war and facing those giants that their fathers were afraid of.

And Joshua and Caleb were ready to lead the way, whose faith never faltered. Whose belief that God's glory would lead them there and they would accomplish His purposes so that His glory would fill the earth.

So what about us? God says He is going to fill the whole world with His glory. Do we believe it enough to act on our faith?

Father, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that if we think we are standing firm to take heed to your word lest pride causes us to fall. It's easy to read a passage like this and say 'Well, I'm not like those guys.' While that may be partly true, all of us have acted faithlessly at times. We've not trusted Your words when we've doubted Your presence or care. Not trusted in Your presence when we know Your Word says You dwell in us. Forgive us for not trusting You and forgetting that Your glory has been seen in and around our own lives. Answered prayers, healing, spiritual growth, maybe you used us to help someone come to faith or grow in faith – all of that is evidence that Your glory is still filling the earth.

Forgive us if we have blamed the sin of someone else, causing us to lose out on blessings. Forgive us when we've ran ahead of You in our strength and fell on our faces. Forgive us when we've said no, 'I can't do this' when we should have said, 'Yes Lord You can do this.'

Blessings still await us, help us to trust You for Your timing. Help us to put Your glory ahead of our own. Thank You that You are not done with us yet. By Your grace and for Your glory, amen.

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If you have comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net