

Passing on the Faith

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Scripture: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-33

THE PROMISE

13:1-3

The Lord said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders." So at the Lord's command, Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites.

13:17-20

When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land."

13:25-33

At the end of forty days, they returned from exploring the land.

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. 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. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 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."

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."

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

This incident we just read was a very important one in the journey from Egypt to Canaan. But unfortunately, this also happens to be one of the saddest incidents in the life of the Israelites; and it made a huge impact. So that is why it is important that we know and understand this incident.

One important thing to realize is that all of the men who went to survey the land were leaders – 12 leaders for 12 tribes. Today's equivalent would be our MPs. There were about close to 6 lakh men, so let's say about close to 10 or 12 lakh people. And there were 12 leaders – almost 1 per lakh. They were leaders and they were responsible people.

The best part is in vs. 1 itself: The Lord said, ".....I am giving to the Israelites." God already promised it; so why were the men sent? They were sent to do the specifics. How is the land? Is it good? Are there trees? Are there walls? They were asked to come back with these small,

small details. But they were supposed to go with the confidence that God had given it to them already. But what did they do? They came back and gave a very bad report.

Now this in fact, had a huge impact on the whole community, and we will see what happened. This incident brought a very strong judgment on the whole community. Yes, whatever they said was true. Their fears were genuine. They were small, like grasshoppers in the sight of the strong enemy. But they forgot one thing! Since the last two years, they were eating manna daily. That very morning they would have had manna. Two chapters earlier, God had provided them with quail in the desert. Even Moses thought that God couldn't do it. They were seeing God's provision on a daily basis. They saw manifestations of His presence in the pillars of cloud and fire. They had no reason not to trust the Lord. That is why God was so upset.

Let us see what happened because of this bad report by the leaders.

THE LACK OF FAITH

Numbers 14:1-12

That night, all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 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 wilderness! 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?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Then Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly: "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and He will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."

We just read about the impact of these leaders who were responsible people, bringing such a bad report. In the process, they discouraged the whole community. In fact, in the book of Joshua, when Caleb remembers this later, he says that these leaders made the whole community literally melt in fear. That was the kind of impact that good or bad leaders can have. And a bad leader can bring about much damage. They were afraid; they rebelled and were even planning to go back to slavery.

The Lord was very much grieved and as we just read: The Lord said that they treated the Lord with contempt. They were not willing to believe in the Lord even though God had guided them on a daily basis. They could at least have remembered that they were eating manna on a daily basis.

In Hebrews 3:12 it says: *See to it that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.* Yes, their anxiety was genuine; their fear was genuine. But they forgot all that the Lord did for them these past years. Similar things can happen to us too, when

we go through problems. But if we dwell on that kind of unbelief for a long time, that can lead to hardening of the heart, and then God cannot work. That is exactly what happened here. Their fear, because they did not deal with it, led to hardening of the heart. Unbelief leads to hardening of our hearts.

But we see wonderful examples of a good leader – Caleb, Joshua, Moses and Aaron. We see that Joshua and Caleb were almost stoned for exercising their faith. What is interesting is that they were not afraid; they stood their ground and they encouraged their community in spite of all the opposition even though they were a big minority.

Now, let's see how Moses intercedes, and also the Lord's judgment on the community.

THE JUDGMENT

Numbers 14:19-23

"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 Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times – 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."

So we see a very strong condemnation and judgment coming on the whole community. If you read the remaining portion, God said that none of them would enter Canaan, which means that as two years were over, they had to wait for the remaining thirty-eight years, going round and round in the desert till the last person among this generation, those over 20 years, were dead. That was a very strong judgment.

So the Lord heard Moses' prayer. God forgave them but they had to live with the consequence of their disobedience. This is a warning for us.

But now let us read vs. 24, God's encouragement to Caleb who stood his ground.

vs 24: "But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it."

What a wonderful promise in the midst of the whole community!

Did Caleb inherit the land? Yes! It is interesting to read in Joshua ch 14. What I liked most about this part was that Caleb recalls. He tells Joshua about the past incident. He says, "I was forty at that time," and then he says, "forty-five years have passed." His age is now eighty-five. What do you think of a man at the age of eighty-five? Let's see what he says in Joshua 14:11. *"I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I am just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then."*

What a man! What is the reason? Do you think he had some extraordinary power or something? I don't think so. The difference was that he knew the Lord was with him. That's what makes the difference! Whatever problems we go through, big or small, if we look at our own resources and our own way of solving it, we will fail. The difference was that Caleb was able to wholeheartedly follow the Lord, and he trusted God.

Now the second judgment is even more painful. We read in vs 33: *"Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert."* That's the sad part. Because of our unfaithfulness, not only us, but also our children suffer. That's something we need to keep in mind. The title of my message is 'Passing on Faith to our children and to our dear ones.' Whether we like it or not, we are actually impacting others.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

1. When we face a crisis (and we will throughout our life – on a daily basis we may face crises, small or big), what should be our response? One way is to get into anxiety and go through depression. Or do we trust in God, look back and see what He has done in our lives and exactly what God expects from us? We can at least recollect – go back and think what the Lord has done in our life.

Psalm 103:2 says, "Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost beings, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits –"

Sometimes we can be so obsessed with the material things and easily forget to be faithful to God and live in obedience to God. So let's remember, the next time when we face a crisis, it will either make us go forward or will take us backwards.

2. The need for good leaders. Out of the twelve leaders, there were only two who really trusted, even though all the twelve of them had experienced God's mercy, God's grace, God's provision. Only two stood their ground. Whether we believe it or not, all of us sitting here are leaders.

What is the definition of a leader? A leader is somebody who impacts others. We may be impacting others in a big way or in a small way, maybe in our homes or our places of work. All of us have our spheres of impact. We have got to be very careful as we are either encouraging people or we are discouraging. We are either building people up or we are bringing them down.

Hebrews 3:12-13 tells us what encouragement can do.

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

We very seldom receive encouragement, but we have our share of discouragements on a daily basis. But let's be encouragers. That is in our hand. We can encourage people to go forward. Be an encourager.

3. What kind of legacy are we leaving behind for our children and for our future generation? As parents we are definitely concerned about our children's future, their education, their placement and so on. Nothing wrong about that! But is that all? It is even more important to instill in our children faith in a living God and a genuine love for Him. It is extremely important to remember that our children, whether we like it or not, are copying us. If we are men and women of faith, they will have that. If we are not, they will not have it. So therefore, we are a huge impact especially in our families. We could influence our children and those in our spheres of influence positively for living for God, or discourage them, or be a hindrance to them.

So let us take a warning from this incident and be like Caleb who trusted God wholeheartedly and was not easily moved by the crisis that came his way.

In closing, I want to read two verses which encourage me a lot.

Philippians 4:5-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:6

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

One thing I liked about both these verses is that there is one thing in common, and that is the word 'thankfulness.' I believe a thankful spirit would go a long way in trusting God. So, when we face problems in life, let us always be thankful to the Lord for what He has done in our lives and that would take us forward. Let us be people who really influence others to go forward in their faith in the Lord.

Shall we pray?

O Lord, our loving Father, we thank you Lord for your word, and how You have recorded these incidents for us, to challenge us, to inspire us, to warn us. We thank You for all that You have done for us in our lives. Lord, we pray that when we face different kinds of problems every day; help us to remember what You did in our lives and not to allow disbelief to overpower us. Instead we pray that Your Spirit would empower us to trust in You, and to go forward so that we would be people of influence. Help us, Lord, to be people of influence, those who encourage others and influence them in a positive way. Help us Lord, in our walk as we go out of this place. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.