

WATCH OUT FOR A SINFUL UNBELIEVING HEART

Speaker: Prof. Joseph John

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Scripture: Exodus 14 and 16, Hebrews 3:7-13

My thoughts today are a continuation of what Pastor did last week. Last week, he shared from Numbers 13 and 14, where we saw how Moses had sent, as per God's command, twelve men, leaders from each and every tribe, out to explore the land of Canaan. God had already promised that it was theirs, but He wanted them to go and explore. When they came back, ten of them, except for Joshua and Caleb, gave a very bad report, so much so that the people of Israel even decided to go back to Egypt. It was that bad. We saw that God was unhappy and told them that they would wander in the desert for 40 years, and only their children and also Joshua and Caleb, would enter Canaan.

When you look at a portion like this, sometimes we wonder why God was so harsh for such a small kind of unbelief. But is that so? That is why I thought we would see two other instances in the life of the nation of Israel to see whether there is a pattern. Mind you, this particular incident in Numbers 13 and 14 happened two years after their exodus from Egypt. Let us see whether there is a pattern so that we can also take warning for our own lives.

Let us turn to **Exodus 14**, and read a few verses.

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ² "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. ³ Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' ⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." So the Israelites did this.

⁸ The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly.

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

¹³ Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, ²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." ²⁷ Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. ²⁸ The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

I am sure that all of us have studied this passage in Sunday School. What are the lessons for us to learn? We can see a pattern. What is the problem? Israel was a nation of almost 6 lakh people. They are stuck between the Red Sea on one side and behind them is the Egyptian army literally chasing them. They are afraid; they don't know what will happen. It was a genuine problem. But what was their response? All of a sudden, they forgot all that God had done to the Egyptians – the ten plagues, especially the last one. The firstborn of the Israelites was saved, but the firstborn of the Egyptians died. They forgot all this. And we see the response of Moses. "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still."

Just before that, you saw how the nation of the Israelites was literally murmuring and grumbling.

¹¹ "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

The problem was genuine, and it was not a simple one. but Moses assured them that God has a plan. What was the problem?

- They did not believe.
- They were not sure whether God had their good in mind when they were asked to march out.

They literally believed they were going to die in the desert. They forgot. Only Moses had the right response.

There is a pattern. There was a problem and their response was very negative. And in spite of that, God worked this wonderful miracle, and even today scientists wonder what happened. You see that not just the Israelites, the entire nations around knew about this, and they were scared of the Israelites because they knew that they were a people who were special to God. They walked on dry ground while their enemies whom they feared all drowned. So things finally worked out far better than they even imagined.

Next, let's look at another incident. We'll read a few verses from Exodus 16. By now, two months are over. They have crossed the red Sea and they had some problems here and there.

Exodus 16:1-8

¹ The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow

my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” ⁸ Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when He gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

16: 11-15

¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.”

16: 35

³⁵ The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

So, here again we see a pattern. There is a problem and this time the problem is that of food. Their response? They forgot all that God did which we read in ch.14. In fact, if you look at ch.15, the entire congregation were all worshipping God and praising God for what He did. Because the deliverance through the Red Sea was such a miraculous sight, they were convinced that the Lord, God was the One who took them out of this. Then roughly two months down the line, once again they are grumbling.

16:3 *If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted.*

I don’t know whether it is really true. They were slaves. Definitely they didn’t have all the luxuries of eating all that is mentioned here. But sometimes, when we go through tough times, we forget all that God did in our lives. Notice, the last verse in ch.16 tells us that God provided them with manna for 40 years. Every day they are reminded of God’s supernatural act. But, sometimes, even though we get blessings, we get used to it and take it for granted, and we forget.

LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THESE TWO INSTANCES.

1. Trust God.

When we are faced with a problem, first of all we question why did this problem come? I am sure none of us want problems and challenges in our life. We would like life to be as easy as possible. But God has different plans for us. One of the first things we should always do is to remember that God is

with us and God has a plan. For example, one of the natural responses which we can have is to doubt God's goodness. That's one of the most dangerous things. This is exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden. The devil was literally able to taunt Eve and he almost convinced her that God doesn't have your good in His mind, and Eve almost believed that. The rest of it was easy.

The same thing can happen to us. One of the first things that can happen to us when we go through tough times is to doubt God's goodness. If you do that, Satan has won. Half the battle is over. Trust is only a question of time. So, that's the first thing to watch out in our lives.

Then, why does God allow all these problems and challenges in our lives? All of us would love all our problems to disappear like a vapor immediately. That doesn't happen. Hardly ever. But what is important is that God wants us to go through the problems. God is with us, but He wants us to go through the problems. God said, "I am with you." Why? Because God wants us to come out strong at the other end.

I think that's something we forget. I'm sure all of us, especially those of us who are working, including students who are going through tough times of training, don't like any pressure. But we all know there is a purpose for it. When we go through training, it seems tough. But later, we come out strong, we come out better, and that's God's plan for us.

So always remember when tough times come, God already knows what is going to happen. God knows the end. but our job is to trust God, first and foremost, and not to doubt His goodness in our lives.

2. Ask for God's Strength.

Moses did this. Every time, he knew just what to do. He went back to God. That's what we should do. When we are faced with a problem, go back to God. Ask God. And also remind yourself of all that God did in your life all these many years.

For example, if we face our problems with grumbling and disbelief, it is the wrong attitude. But despite all the Israelites grumbling and their disbelief, God took care. And that's God's grace, God's mercy. But they lost the kind of blessings which they could have as theirs if they trusted, like Moses. If only they had trusted, knowing well that God was with them, and God would take them through.

I think that's the lesson for us to learn. But unfortunately, we see that again. if you read the book of Numbers, and later Judges, and all of the books, with the nation of Israel, this pattern continued again and again. whenever they had a problem, if it was very severe, they went back to God and God brought them deliverance. But they soon forgot.

I hope you all have listened to Pastor's podcast on Nehemiah ch. 9. It's a narration of the entire history of the nation of Israel. It's so interesting, that Nehemiah 9 is basically a prayer of repentance, where Nehemiah has assembled all the entire crowd and they were remembering the past days how God took care of them, and also how they were unfaithful. And they were repenting.

Now the nation of Israel is very much a picture of us to some extent. The problems they faced were very tough. Think of a scenario with your small children in a desert, sometimes without water. It was very tough. But God allowed it. God wanted them to trust Him that He would fulfil His promise given to them and to their forefathers that God would take them through safely. That's the challenge for us.

How can we live a consistent Christian life?

A consistent Christian life, not just ups and downs.

Hebrews 3:7-13

⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you hear His voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts

as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the wilderness,

⁹ where your ancestors tested and tried Me,

though for forty years they saw what I did.

¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation;

I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray,

and they have not known My ways.’

¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger,

‘They shall never enter My rest.’ ”

¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

Now this portion from the letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians when they were going through tough times because of their faith. He was reminding them of their ancestors. And again, the warning for us. And God says here, “They saw what I did, but they tested and tried Me for 40 years.” Let that not be said about us. v. 10 says, “They have not known My ways.”

So to have a consistent Christian life:

- One of the first things is to trust that God is with us. If you have received Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you are His son/daughter. That’s a privilege and that’s the biggest privilege that we have, more than our job or family or wealth. And we need to keep reminding ourselves that we always need to see that as our biggest privilege.
- Whenever you go through tough times, always think about your past, what God did. I am sure all of us can narrate several occasions when God took us through tough times and Brought us safely through them. Not only safely but much better than what we expected. God wants us to exercise our faith in such times and trust and keep going.
- One mistake we all can make is that we think it’s all about us. no, not at all. None of us will be able to live a consistent Christian life if we depend on our own strength, because it’s not in us. Even after becoming God’s children, we still have our old nature with us. but we have God’s divine resources. God’s Spirit. The day we received Jesus, God’s Spirit is with us as a permanent resident.

v.12 says, “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

That’s a warning for us. We should always watch out whether we have a sinful unbelieving heart. If we have that, that will take us away from God. And a solution is given in v.13.

¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today”, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

Now this is one verse which has always challenged me and also encouraged me. On an average day, if you think about how many people encouraged you, the answer would be none. People always criticize. Hardly anyone would appreciate what you have done. But here it says, "Encourage one another daily." What is our motivation to come to church? Yes, we come to church to receive; but we should remember that we should come to church also to give. Encourage one another daily. Ask one another, "How are you doing? Is there any prayer point? Can I pray for you? Maybe God gave you a promise from this verse. Maybe that promise is for this person you are talking to. Do that. We should keep doing that.

But always remember, we have the best encourager and teacher, God's Spirit, with us all the time, 24/7. But in order for God's Spirit to work wonderfully in our lives, two things.

- We need to give permission. We need to obey; we need to surrender.
- Also, we need to have God's Word in our heart. I believe we are very lucky. One century ago, people were not this lucky. Most of us have multiple copies of the Bible. But how much time are you spending in reading God's word, studying God's word, investing your time. I believe we are living in rough times. Why? Every now and then, a notification comes on our mobile; and we get tempted.

As a teacher, one of my biggest challenges is the attention span of the students. We are trying to see how to make our lectures more interesting, because students lose interest and all of us are affected. Bible v/s mobile or social media is one of the biggest challenges today. But all of us have time. it's a lie if you say that you are too busy. Something is wrong with you. God gave 24 hours to everybody, whether this generation or the previous generation. We need to make sure that we invest time. if we don't do it, we pay for it.

So, let me encourage you to not just read the Bible, but study it. And don't stop there. through the day, think about what God spoke to you maybe through your reading in the morning. Are there some changes that you need to do? Meditate. The Bible talks about meditating on God's word. With the help of God's Spirit, being an encourager and a teacher and a counselor permanently residing within us, and we cooperating and obeying, with God's grace, we will be able to live a consistent Christian life.

So, it's not about us, but it's all about surrendering our lives, and having that desire. So, next time when you have a tough time, always remember, think about the nation of Israel. Don't follow the pattern. Make it a point to trust God and believe that God has a plan for it and God will take you through.

Amen.
