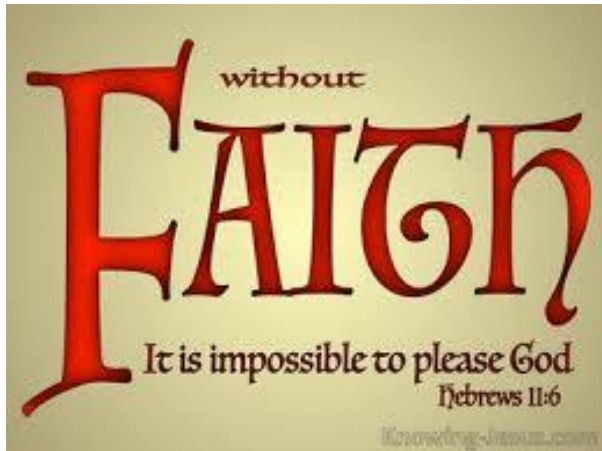


The Contrast of Faith and Unbelief
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
November 8, 2020



Diaspora XXXIV – The Church Scattered, Thirty-fourth Sunday

Text: Numbers 13:1-3, 26-33; 14:26-32

Purpose: The story of Israel's disobedience clearly illustrates the choice all of us face. Will we trust God to do as He has promised or will we trust in ourselves? Two of the twelve spies chose to trust God in spite of overwhelming odds. God blessed their faith while condemning the ten and the nation of Israel for their lack of trust in God. Will you trust God or will you reject His sovereignty over your life?

Beware, brothers, lest perhaps
there be in any one of you an evil
heart of unbelief in falling away
from the living God.
Heb. 3:12

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Do you know the legend of the Cherokee Indian youth's rite of passage?

His dad takes him into the forest blindfolded and leaves him alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not take off the blindfold until the ray of sun shines through it.



He is all by himself. He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he is a MAN.

He cannot tell the other boys of this experience. Each lad must come into his own manhood.

The boy in our story was, naturally, terrified. He could hear all kinds of noises. Beasts were all around him. Maybe even a human would hurt him. The wind blew the grass and earth and it shook his stump. But he sat stoically, never removing the blindfold.

It would be the only way he could be a man.

Finally, after a horrific night the sun appeared and he removed his blindfold. It was then that he saw his father sitting on the stump next to him - at watch the entire night.

This is also true of our Lord as well. Even though we are going through some very difficult times, the future seems uncertain, the enemy seems to be at every turn, we have a God that is with us. Hebrews 3:5 says, *“I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.”*¹ This is the promise of God to you.

I. Let Us Consider the Background

This morning I want to go back and look at the continuing story of the children of Israel. Two weeks ago, we finished looking at the Ten Commandments. The children of Israel spent three months to travel to Mt Sinai. They spent the rest of that year building the Tabernacle in the wilderness.



God continued to be present with the people with a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. God was with them, watching over them and guiding them to the Promised Land. Before entering, God needed to prepare them. During this time, Moses continued to be instructed by the Lord and Moses in turn, instructed the people.

A good portion of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are spent expanding and expounding on the Ten Commandments. Central to their time there in the wilderness was worshipping God in the Tabernacle. God gave clear instruction as to how it was to be built, who was to serve in the Tabernacle, and how their sin could be atoned for. The instructions and guidelines as to how that was to be done was spelled out in these first five books of the Bible. Once the people were taught, and the Tabernacle was built, God was ready to move His people, Israel into the Promised Land – the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Up to this point, the children of Israel grumbled again and again about the provisions provided by the Lord. They were repeatedly chastised by God, but their hearts still were not right. At one point, the Lord was ready to destroy the people and start again with only Moses. But Moses interceded on their behalf time and time again – calling them a “stiffed neck” people, prone to sin again and again.

Their response to this last command from the Lord would prove once and for all if they were going to trust God or fail due to unbelief.



¹ Mikey's Funnies, May 3, 2019 – A Stump “Funny”

II. Let us Hear the Command from the Lord

The command of the Lord came to Moses saying, “*Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.*” (Numbers 13:1-2) So Moses did as the Lord instructed. He chose the head of each family to be among the spies.



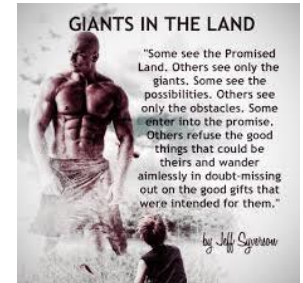
From God’s perspective, He wanted the children to go into the land, see the great wealth that they were going to receive, and come back to the people and report how good and great the Lord really is. In verse two, God promised to give them the land. When God promises something, you might as well count it done.

III. Let Us Hear the Report from Ten of the Twelve Spies

The twelve men who were representative of each tribe headed from the Wilderness of Paran and went into the Promised Land. While on the journey through the land, they saw great fortified cities, large and fruitful vineyards, and they even saw some of the giants in the land. Moses instructed them before they left to “*Be of good courage.*” But during those forty days, they must have allowed fear to take root in their hearts. They could not see how God could give them this bountiful land - a land flowing with milk and honey - a land with large fortified cities.

The twelve spies forgot that they were on a tour of what God had ***already*** promised to give them. They thought that they would have to do it in their own might and strength. They forgot that God would be with them.

When they returned to give their report, ten of the spies only saw the negative perspective in moving into the Promised Land. They were afraid of the fortified cities, they were afraid of their strength and might, they were afraid of the giants living in the land. Ten of the twelve spies said, “NO” we do not need to move forward. The other two spies pleaded with the people, but they would not budge.



God was again ready to destroy this people – because of their unbelief – but Moses interceded on their behalf once again.

IV. Let us Consider the Folly of Unbelief

Their minds were not considering the mighty hand of God. They had forgotten what the Lord had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt.



They forgot about how the armies of Egypt were drowned in the Red Sea. They forgot about the water out of a rock, and manna and quail coming down from heaven. They were only concerned about carnal things. The carnal mind is against the things of God.

Until that mindset is changed and begins to accept the grace and provision offered by God and appreciate the faithfulness of God, that carnal mind will never understand the ways of God.

Those spies saw the beautiful land, but they only saw it through blinded eyes. They may have heard about the goodness of God, but they never REALLY heard because they only had deaf ears. Until the heart is right with God, then everything else is wrong. Unbelief towards God flows out of a carnal heart. No amount of evidence could change those ten spies' minds.

Let Us Consider Seven Characteristics of Unbelief.

The folly of unbelief does several things in the heart of the faithless.

First, unbelief measures difficulties by human strength.

The spies said, *"We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we."*

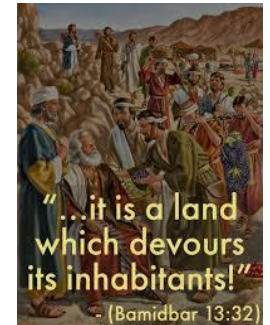
(13:31) They also reported that *"We are like grasshoppers in their sight."* (13:33) It is true that there were individuals that were giants in that land. They were the descendents of Anak – the family that Goliath later came from. What they saw caused them to take their eyes off God and put them on their enemy. When they saw how powerful the giants were, they realized in their own strength, they would be defeated.



We as sinners face a similar fate in our lives. There may be a sin in your life that is so large that you may say, "This has such a strong hold on me that even God cannot save me." We need to say, "In my strength I cannot overcome this enemy. But with God on my side, it is defeated." We may think and often we say, "God cannot help us!" We may even put another plan in place to meet that need, but God can cancel all of our plans. We may make plans, but only God can make it happen.

Second, unbelief makes void the Word of God.

God told them that the land that He was going to give them was *"filled with milk and honey."* When the spies returned, they said, *"It is a land that devours its inhabitants."* They didn't trust the word of God. They only trusted in what they saw with their eyes and heard with their ears. Their unbelief voided the word of God in their hearts. God had promised them the land, but they didn't trust God.



Thirdly, unbelief despises the provision of God.

As the ten spies were reporting about the land, they brought nothing but bad news back. In Psalms 106:24, it says, *"That they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe His word."* God offered a gift of land to them and they rejected the gift. They saw no beauty in the land and only despised it.

Christ offers His salvation to all who will believe, but many not only reject God's offer, they despise it. Many

individuals that have turned their back on God spit at the offer of salvation. They do not want forgiveness. They do not want the grace offered by God. They despise the provision of God.

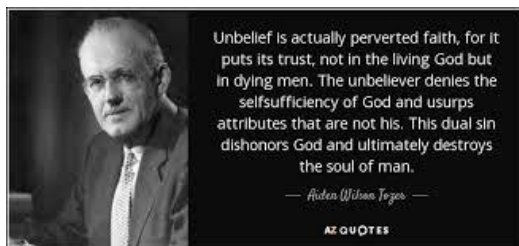
Fourthly, unbelief dishonors God himself.

When the ten spies gave their report this to the children of Israel, the people cried all through the night upon hearing the news about the land. From the time they left Egypt until this negative report from the ten spies, they rejected God. This last rejection almost caused God to wipe them off the face of the earth. He would have if Moses had not interceded. Here was the Creator of the universe, the One that brought them out of Egypt, being rejected again and again by His creation, His chosen people.

“And the Lord said, “How long will these people reject me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have

performed among them?”” God was ready to destroy them. Moses interceded on their behalf and spared them from receiving the wrath of God. When we refuse to believe, it is a slap in God’s face.

God was gracious to the children of Israel from the moment they left Egypt. God has been gracious to you and me since our birth. Are you similar to the children of Israel? Is your unbelief dishonoring God?



Are you still in a state of rebellion against the provision of God? It was our unbelief that pierced His heart and drove the nails into His hands and feet.

Fifth, unbelief is the source of sin and sorrow

“All that night, the people wept and murmured.” (14:1-4) Why is it so easy for men and women to believe a lie rather than the truth? Those that continue to reject God will weep and wail because of their sin. The children of Israel knew that they had failed the test of faith in God. They knew that judgment was coming.

When we have faith in God, He wipes away our tears. When we practice unbelief, we cry “Make us a captain.” The children of Israel were ready to appoint a new leader and head back to Egypt. They were ready to abandon God and His provision of the Promised Land. How foolish we are to refuse the blessings of God.

Even today we need to be careful and not believe the report of false reporters. Many in our world want us to believe a lie instead of the truth. “We must have faith and trust in God. That is the only true and sure thing.”²

Sixth, unbelief presumes to succeed without God.

After God had pronounced judgment for their unbelief, some of the children of Israel decided to proceed to claim the Promised Land without God’s protection and blessing.

² Quote from Jo Anne Sanderson Dew on October 3, 2004

“They presumed to go up ... Then the Amalekites and Canaanites came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.”

Others have presumed the blessing of God.

Samson presumed that he still had strength when he went to face the Philistines. Instead, “he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.” Samson presumed the blessing of God.

The foolish virgins failed to be prepared as they waited for the bridegroom. While they were gone, the bridegroom came and they were left out. When they came knocking on the door after the door was shut, they realized it was too late.

This is the presumption of almost every unbeliever. They hope to get the provision in the end even though they do not believe God’s word. The unbeliever continues to go through life as if all is well in the world. They will not accept salvation in the manner offered by God. They want salvation on their own terms. They are like the children of Israel that went out looking for manna on the seventh day and found none.

Seventh, unbelief incurs the sentence of death.

The Lord told those unbelievers, *“As I live, your carcass shall fall in the wilderness.”* Their unbelief incurred a sentence of death.

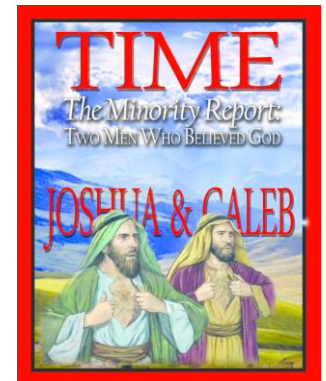


God sentenced the people to forty years of wandering in the desert. The ten spies were killed immediately as God judged them. That evening they knew that the word of God had been given and judgment was final.

But there was some good news. All the children age twenty and younger were spared from this sentence of death in the wilderness. The parents were afraid that their children would die in the desert, but God preserved them to see the mighty hand of God. God also preserved the two spies that gave a positive report on the land of Canaan.

V. The Minority Report

These two men, Caleb and Jacob, returned to the camp and gave a good report. *“Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.””* (13:30) But as they reported good news, the bad news drowned out the good report.



Today we need to respond to God’s invitation with faith. Our response can be either a “Yes” or “No.” There is no in between.

Let Us Examine the Seven Actions of Faith

First, faith confirms the promise of God.

Caleb reported that, *“We came to the land, and surely it flows with milk and honey.”* (13:27). He believed God and

when he went and spied out the land, he found that God's word was true. Those who prove His word will find it faithful. God promises peace in believing, and also rest. When Christ is believed, God is honored, because the soul being justified justifies God.

Second, faith exhibits the proof of God's faithfulness.

Caleb and the others proved to the people that God is faithful by the fruit they brought back. *"They went and showed them the fruit of the land."* (13:26) Every believer in Christ should be producing fruit in their lives. The fruit of the spirit includes love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. (Eph. 6:22) As we walk with God by faith, these fruits are demonstrated and exhibited in our life.



Third, faith advocates present possession.

Caleb exhibited faith beyond compare. He was willing to go into the land immediately and take possession of what God had already promised. *"Let us go up,"* was the cry of Caleb. He was willing to do just that – take God at his word.

How many of us have heard the promises of God and failed to take possession of them? God has promised to forgive us if we believe. God has promised us eternal life if we accept the sacrifice offered on the cross by Jesus Christ. Simply knowing what is offered is not enough! We must accept it and take possession of the promise of salvation.

The children of Israel failed to believe and as a result, they failed to enter the Promised Land.

Fourth, faith laments the folly of unbelief.

When Caleb and Joshua heard that the people would not accept the promise of a land from God, they tore their clothes in anguish. Caleb, Joshua, Moses and Aaron fell on their face before God knowing the wrath of God would fall for their failure to have faith in God.

Jesus who had all the power in the world, lamented over Jerusalem's lack of faith in Him. Those that understand the grace of God cannot understand the stubbornness others exhibit in their failure to accept by faith what God has provided. Only those who believe God can understand the folly and sin of doubting Him.

Fifth, faith rests exclusively in the Lord.

Caleb said, *"If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into the land, and the Lord is with us, fear them not."* (14:8-9) Caleb recognized that there would be difficulty, but his trust was in the Lord, not in what he saw or heard. Faith in God acknowledges that "Nothing is too hard for God."



Those that have trust in God will have

- 1) His pleasure, because "he delights in us."
- 2) His promise – because "He will bring us."
- 3) His presence – "He is with us"
- 4) His power – "He is able"

By faith Abraham believed God, by faith Peter walked on water, by faith we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

Sixth, faith follows God always and everywhere.

The Lord said of Caleb, “*Caleb has followed me fully.*” (14:24) God justifies fully, and always, and everywhere, those who continually trust in Him. This is the life of faith. Faith in God is an act. It didn't matter to Caleb how numerous the giants were, or how high the walls were. His heart was stayed on God. We need not fear because God is always with us. Those that follow God may suffer persecution, trials and tribulation, but they are accepted and beloved by God.

Lastly, those that exhibit faith in God, inherit the promises of God.

God promised Caleb that because of his faith in God, he would receive the right to enter into the Promised Land. Forty years later, Caleb entered the Promised Land and was the first to accept the challenge of going to war to defeat the inhabitants of the Promised Land. God rewarded his faith and God kept His promise.

God will come and take his children home to the Promised Land of Heaven one day. Only those that have trusted in Christ will be rewarded. All unbelievers will be rejected and sent away from God's presence.



What a contrast! Those that fail to believe are condemned already. Those that believe inherit eternal life. God gave the children of Israel a choice. God has given us a choice as well. Are we willing to surrender our hearts and lives to him and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Or are you clinging to your own self sufficiency convinced that you know best?

God is faithful to forgive, but God will judge unbelief!

LET US PRAY

