

Lessons from a Faithless and Fearful People

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Numbers

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Our passage this morning is going to be in the book of Numbers starting in chapter 13 and we will read all the way through chapter 14. It is a rather large and lengthy passage but we are going to read it in its completion. That will take a little bit of time but I think it's worthwhile to see the unfolding story plus it's a fast-moving passage. So it is action-packed and we're going to see a lot that comes out of that.

Now when last I preached and this was well over a couple of months ago, we were in the book of Joshua, Joshua 3 and 4, looking at Israel going into the land of promise after having wandered in the wilderness for some 40 years. We're actually going to backtrack a little bit, just the first time that they arrived at the land of Canaan and see what transpired to lead them to actually going back out in the wilderness. I've titled this message "Lessons from a Faithless and Fearful People," and what I hope that we see this morning is that the faithlessness and the fearfulness of the people of God in the book of Numbers, from that we can see that we are to step out in faith and obedience to the Lord and ultimately that our strength does not define who we are but it is the Lord who defines who we are. It is his strength that saves us and it's his strength that leads us and delivers us.

So we're going to be in Numbers 13, we'll read all the way through 14. Stick with me, it's long. I promise it's a great story. Starting in verse 1,

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them." 3 So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel. 4 And these were their names: From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph (that is, from the tribe of Manasseh), Gaddi the son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of

Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. 16 These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua.

I'm just very proud of myself for getting through that list. Ty has been going through some very very long lists and seemingly not messing up, so I'm just proud I made it through that short one. Verse 17,

17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, "Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, 18 and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, 19 and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, 20 and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. 21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. 22 They went up into the Negeb and came to Hebron. Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 And they came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they also brought some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster that the people of Israel cut down from there. 25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." 30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." 32 So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. 33 And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

Are you all still with me? Chapter 14,

1 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." 5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. 6 And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." 10 Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. 11 And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? 12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." 13 But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, 14 and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, 16 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.' 17 And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, 18 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.' 19 Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now." 20 Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word. 21 But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, 22 none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore

to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. 24 But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. 25 Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valleys, turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea." 26 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 27 "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. 28 Say to them, 'As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: 29 your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, 30 not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. 32 But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. 33 And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. 34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.' 35 I, the LORD, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die." 36 And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing up a bad report about the land-- 37 the men who brought up a bad report of the land--died by plague before the LORD. 38 Of those men who went to spy out the land, only Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive. 39 When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly. 40 And they rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, "Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned." 41 But Moses said, "Why now are you transgressing the command of the LORD, when that will not succeed? 42 Do not go up, for the LORD is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies. 43 For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you, and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you." 44 But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah.

What a passage. Let's go before the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for this time that you have given us in your word, a time that you have allowed us to see the failings of the wilderness generation, those that were about to be sent out and killed in the wilderness for their unfaithfulness. Lord, I pray that we would learn lessons from this, that we would not be like this people who reject your faithfulness time and time again, who reject your mercy and try and do things on their own accord in their own strength. Lord, I pray that we would fall before you knowing that you are our strength and our only source of salvation. Be with us this morning as we look in your word, as we think through the failings of these people. Stir our hearts with affections towards you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now next week, I know I'm a week ahead on this, next week is the 31st of October which we celebrate Reformation Day but I actually want to think about for a moment the man who was Martin Luther, a man who was a Catholic monk who wrestled with a great deal of things, and we celebrate a little bit over 500 years now of the spark that set ablaze the Reformation. But Luther struggled before he nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church. He struggled. He wrestled with a great deal. His first Mass that he actually led, he could not get past the opening words because he realized he was addressing a holy God and he was not a man worthy to do so. He was overwhelmed with the glory of God, overwhelmed with the holiness of God, so much so that it is said that he would spend hours a day in a confessional. He realized the nature of his own sin, the problems with who he was, and so he would spend 6-8, maybe even 10 hours in a confessional a day and for him that wasn't even enough because he was overwhelmed with his own guilt, his own shame. He did not know what to do. He struggled with the justice of God. When he would read passages out of Romans and he saw justice, he was terrified of the wrath of God being poured out on sinners, but one day something changed for him, something clicked. When he saw the justice of God, he no longer saw it as just the wrath of God being poured out but it's to be justified, it is the free gift of righteousness from Christ Jesus. So it's not what the Lord saw in him in his own works but it's what Christ was, and out of that comes the great doctrine justification by faith alone. He finally understood and tasted the glories of salvation. He took it off of himself and off of his own strength and what he was because he knew he was a wretch, but he saw the glories of Christ Jesus.

Our passage this morning displays a great flaw in the nation of Israel. They failed to have faith in the power of God and they failed to trust in the plans of God, relying on their own strength. So this morning, I hope that we will learn from their failings. That's why I've titled it "Lessons from a Faithless and Fearful People." I hope that we see their failings and realize that salvation is not our own doing, it's not based on who we are, on our own merit, on our own strength, but it's based upon the work of God through Christ Jesus alone.

Now a little bit of context, set the background before we really jump into the unfolding story here. Israel, now the last time I preached from Joshua, I went all the way back to the covenant with Abraham. I'm not going to do it this time because that's a long story and we've already got a long one before us, so we're just going to go back to the exodus. Right, so Israel is in slavery in Egypt. They are under the oppression of the Egyptians.

They are slaves to them. They have no rights. They are in slavery so God raises up Moses and he says, "I'm going to send you, you'll be my chosen messenger, you're going to deliver my people." So Moses goes and he goes before Pharaoh and we know the great line from the Disney movie, "Let my people go," over and over and over again, right? So Moses goes in. Now eventually through 10 different and exceedingly great plagues, the heart of Pharaoh is turned for a moment, he lets the people go, and off they go fleeing Egypt. Now we know his heart doesn't last like that very long.

So the Israelites are heading into the wilderness, fleeing from Egypt. God has delivered them in a mighty way. Pharaoh's heart is again hardened so he pursues them. He chases after them desiring to take them back or maybe even kill them because he wants to be righteous, he wants to be great in the name of the world, and this has put a mark against his name. So he pursues them. They arrive at the Red Sea after the Lord led them with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, which is just amazing to consider. They arrive at the Red Sea. Now they're stuck. You've got the sea in front of you, the Egyptians behind you, what are you going to do? God uses Moses to part the waters of the Red Sea. He sends his people across safely and then the Egyptians follow after and the sea swallows them up. The Egyptian army is no more. God has delivered them.

So they begin wandering. Where we're at right now is a year removed from this. They begin wandering through the wilderness on their way to Sinai. They begin to grumble against the Lord. They're hungry. They have nothing to eat. They remember the food in Egypt. They're thinking about this constantly so God provides manna from heaven, another act of mercy upon them. They're thirsty this time. They have nothing to drink so God through Moses calls him to strike a stone and out flows water, another amazing act of deliverance for God's people, God showing his power, his salvation, and yet they continue to grumble.

When they're at Sinai and the glory of the Lord is being revealed at the very top of the mountain, so much so that thunder and lightning is rolling around and they're terrified, the line is here and they're saying, "We're not going past it because God is bigger and mightier than we thought." When Moses is up there getting the law from the Lord, what do they do? They create a golden calf, something to worship, because they're a fickle people. They don't see the promises of the Lord and say, "I'm going to follow him." They look at themselves and think, "Well, we've got to have something. We've got to use something." It's all a looking towards themselves rather than looking towards the Lord and all of these instances the faithlessness of the people is put on display. They are a faithless generation and yet God's patience is being shown, right? We looked at in Proverbs, one of my favorite verses where it's talking about how the wicked are stupid essentially. This was not a smart generation. You see all of these mighty things of God and you're thinking they have to be overwhelmed with his glory. Obedience has to be easy for them because all of these things are being displayed, and yet they show time and time again that they are faithless because they don't understand who God is, they don't understand what he is doing, and they have a much higher view of who they actually are.

God's patience and his mercy is being put on display throughout this generation yet we have to ask: is it coming to an end? I mean, he has been very patient with them. Is it beginning to be stretched thin? And the first thing that we're going to look at in our passage this morning, I've broken it down into a couple different sections so it's easier to eat up, but first is the mission and report of the spies. We're going to look at what they are called into.

So you're back in chapter 13. The Lord speaks to Moses saying, "Send some spies into the land." So it begins. They have arrived at the southern border of the land of Canaan, this is the land that God promised all the way back in Genesis 17 to Abram who was Abraham. It says in Exodus, "I'm going to give you this land. My promises are sure. I'm going to give you this land, go spy it out." Now they weren't sent into spy out the land to see if they could do it. That wasn't the nature of what this was at all. They weren't sent to say, "Let's see if it's possible. If not, we'll try again later." This was a battle plan. So they're trying to get strategy as to what to do, going into the land.

"Go into the land and from each tribe of your fathers send a man, everyone a chief among them." So the naming of the spies, 10 of them you really don't know a lot about and you're not really going to know a lot about. They are a wicked people. They're faithless. They have no trust in the Lord as we're going to see in a second. Two of them are very important and are going to be key figures throughout this story and the unfolding story of the entirety of the Old Testament. First you have Joshua or Hoshea. His name originally was Hoshea but as we noted in this passage, Moses changes it to Joshua. Now Hoshea means "he saves." The exact translation of his name is "he saves," but his name is changed to Joshua which means "Yahweh saves," and that's going to be a very important theme throughout this passage. The second name that is important is Caleb which is a very unfortunate name if you look at the translation of it because some translate it as the word "dog." Not a great name but there's a different nature to his name. Caleb is also translated as "whole heart or wholehearted." This will serve as a good reminder as his wholehearted faith to the Lord in this passage. So you have these 10 we don't know a lot about, we're not really going to know a lot about other than they're not great people, and then you have the two, "Yahweh saves," and "wholehearted." Key themes throughout the passage.

Now the task is very simple as they are sent into the land, "Go and look. Get a battle plan. Get a strategy. See what we're up against." And they're told to complete several different tasks as they go into the land. See the nature of the land, what does it look like, what's the topography, figure out where things are located, the cities, how it unfolds, get a good idea. Now they're going to have to see what are the people like. So this battle plan is really unfolding: we need to know what land we're going to be fighting on, we need to know what people we're fighting. So what are these people like? Are these people few or are they many? Are we going up against great numbers or small numbers? Is the land good or bad? That's an important question. It's good to understand what type of land are we going into, especially given that they're going to have to figure out where are we going to settle in this land. Then they ask are the cities or camps, are they camps or are they strongholds, which is really big in battle. You want to know wherever you're going

to battle is it just a simple, easy to take, or is it fortified? So what's the nature of what we're going up against? Are the people rich or poor? Are there trees or not in that one? Is this a fertile land? Is it a fruitful land? Does it have the capabilities of crops and things like that? And then the last command is bring back fruit.

So this is the battle plan: you're going to go into the land, you're going to wander around, you're going to get the idea and the lay of the land, see who these people are, and then tell us the nature of what grows there. But there is an important caveat here in verse 20. So he lays out this is everything that you're supposed to do, verse 20, "[see] whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage." Be of good courage. This was the big charge to them. So as they're going into the land, I mean, it has to be a terrifying scene. They've just left Egypt so they've seen God deliver them into this. Now they're going to be going covert mission, underground spies, trying to figure out how they're going to attack this land. But Moses says, "Be of good courage." Now we know that 10 of the 12 are not going to be of good courage but this is a major call to them, that in the obedience of God it does take courage especially when you're facing some very big things.

So then they enter the land just as they are instructed. So, so far, so good. Up to the first section here, just as Moses has said, they're going to do. They're going to go into the land. They're going to get a lay of the land. They're going to take notes. They're going to bring it back to the people. So far, so good until we get to the reports of the spies. You get really two contrasting reports here. You have the bad spies versus Caleb and Joshua. This starts in verse 25. So, "At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land." Now imagine the people of Israel are just kind of waiting, "Let's see what happens, see what unfolds, hope the Egyptians don't somehow miraculously show up." There is some eager anticipation here as they're waiting to see what they're going to be up against.

The spies arrive so it's so far, so good in the fact that all 12 of them are still alive, that's good. No one died on the mission. We know that there is something going on here but then they start to give reports, they start to tell of what the land is like. Verse 27, "they told him," told them, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit." Now it makes note earlier that the fruit, the grapes that they were carrying around, it took two men to hold it so it's not like they went and plucked a little tiny bit of grapes and said, "It's got some food." They're carrying massive bushels of it to show this is an exceedingly fruitful land. It's exactly what God said. It's exactly what God said. In Exodus when God came before Moses, he said, "You're going to lead my people into a land flowing with milk and honey." So everyone is thinking it's got to be a bountiful land, it's got to be a fruitful land, and the spies come back and say, "It's exactly that. 100% what God has said. It is exactly that. It is bountiful. It is fruitful. We can make a life here."

Now if they stopped right there, we have an easy story. They don't stop there. There is a big however in verse 28, "However," so everything God has said, it's true, "However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the

Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." So there are a lot of people here. This is not a land with just a few people. It's not like the state of Montana where there's five people per hundred square miles. There's people everywhere. This is a bountiful place but it's also well-fortified. We're going up against a lot and they're big people. They are massive people. It's like if you're playing a basketball game and everyone that shows up is 6'11". What am I supposed to do with that? My dad was 6'4", when we played basketball that was enough for me. He'd beat me every single time. So they walk out there and they say, "They're huge, we're small, what are we going to do? What are we going to do?"

Caleb gives a different report, though. Caleb gives a different report. Everyone is starting to panic here. The spies are before Moses but they're also before the entire congregation. They're giving this report of how massive the people are and how basically even though it's what God said, they're not going to take it. There's no way. There's no way that they're going to be able to do this. Caleb quiets the people which means everyone was in an uproar, fear had to be all over the camp, they had to be terrified of what is going on there. Caleb quiets them down and says, "Let's go into the land. Let's go into the land. We can do it. God has said it's your land, you take it. We can do it. Let's go!" Because he understands who God is. He understands what God has already done for them and so he says, "We're going to go into the land."

Then the 10 bad spies respond again in verse 32, "So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'" So these are definitely glass half empty type people. They see everything that's unfolding before them, even though the land is exactly what God said, they look at their own stature, they look at their own power and think, "No way. There's no way that we can take this. There's no way that we can do this." They showed a total lack of faith and understanding of who God was, right? They're looking at themselves. They look at their height and they're starting to look at a height chart and realize, "We're not measuring up here. Their cities are great, our weaponry is probably not the greatest in the world, we just fled from Egypt. But God has said that's your land. You are going into it and I'm going to lead you." Caleb understands it. Joshua understands it. But the 10, they give a bad report. They give bad details.

Now every year in college basketball we have March Madness. I'm a big fan of March Madness. I like college basketball especially coming from Kentucky. That's the only thing that really exists there. Football lasts for about two weeks and then it's gone. March Madness is huge there. So one of the great stories in all of March Madness was the 1985 Villanova basketball team. So as the tournament is beginning, you're starting to get your seeding. Villanova is seeded as an eighth seed which is not really boding well for your confidence with them winning the championship. Really it's 1-4 that you think they've

got a shot. Everyone else is a big question mark and if you're a 16 seed, you're no hope unless you're playing Virginia. Had to make that comment.

So the 1985 Villanova basketball team draws an eighth seed and their bracket is brutal. It is absolutely brutal. They come in number 8 and they face the likes of Michigan, who I believe was a number 1 seed; Maryland, a number 5 seed; number 2 seed North Carolina; LSU, Kansas, Notre Dame. All of them, all of those teams are massive powerhouses in basketball at that point. Big, big, big teams. They went on to beat the number 9 seed, Dayton, in their first round game. The number 1 seed, Michigan, in their next. The 5 seed, Maryland, after that. The 2 seed, North Carolina, and then the 2 seed, Memphis, setting up a date with the number 1 overall team, Georgetown, and in 1985 they were a big team because they had Patrick Ewing on their team.

Now you have to wonder what that locker room is like, right? So they've done all of this stuff. They have built all the way up to this point. What is the locker room like? Are they fearful? Are they worried? Do they think, "We can't do it"? Then you have to think about the speech going into it. Their coach really could have done this one of two ways, walked in and go, "We're an eighth seed, they're a one seed. They've got this really tall guy. We're definitely not matching up here. You've done well, your run is over." Now it would be ludicrous to think that he would come in there and say that, right? No coach in their right mind is going to walk in, even if he knows you're outmatched, and say, "You're outmatched and you're gonna lose." There's no way he walked in there. It was probably some rousing speech showing that they are able to overcome adversity, they've done it all year, and truly they can do it now. And I tell you, they won the 1985 championship and to the date, I think it is still one of the biggest upsets in all of college basketball that an eighth seed won the title. But you look at what had to lead to that point, all of these really big games that they won time and time again, and I guarantee their coach didn't say to them, "Well, you've done enough. Runners up is good."

This is where we're at with Israel, right? The spies come back and they've seen everything that's unfolded up until this point. Now God has delivered them time and time and time and time again and yet they go into the land, see the people, and say, "It ain't happening." There's no hope. There is no rousing speech here. The greatest failing of these spies was that they did not trust in the promises and power of God. They did not trust in who God was. They saw the sheer size of the people there and they folded, they gave up. Instead of being as Moses had commanded them, men of good courage, they were filled with fear. They were a fearful people.

Friends, we need to learn from their failings. What they failed to realize is that their God was bigger than their enemies, that they did not serve some small God who could not handle their circumstances, he was bigger than all of it. This was the God who had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians, led them through the wilderness up to this point. This is a big God. He was much larger than their enemies and, friends, we serve a God that is far greater than everything that we face, anything that we face. He is greater than our worst circumstance. He is greater than our worst trial. He is far greater than even our own sin. So we must cast aside our fear and live our lives in faith by

trusting in the promises of the Lord and knowing that his word is true, living based upon what he has called us to, having a high view of who he is. I'm a big proponent of what has been called big God theology which means our entire lives, our theology needs to be informed by a massive God. We don't serve a small God, we serve the God who holds the entirety of the universe in the palm of his hand and yet he loves us and cares for us.

This is the God we serve so we set aside our fear and we must be very cautious of who we listen to as well. The Israelites listened to the spies as we'll see in a minute, they listened to these people that did not trust in God and did not have a right view of God. We need to be cautious of what we listen to, who we put before us. If they ever say something that is contrary to the word of God, contrary to something God has said, don't listen. Cast it aside because the words of God are far better. Do not listen to those that speak against the commands of the Lord, and this is a charge for your pastors and leaders as well. They are to be people of the word. If their life is living contrary to the word, then they are not being obedient to who God has called them to be. They are to be those who rely on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord and not on the understanding of men. So learn from their fear. Trust in God and have a high view of who God is.

The second part of our passage is the response of the people. So we've seen kind of this unfolding narrative of the faithlessness and fearfulness of the people and now we're really going to see the whole congregation respond. It starts in chapter 14, verse 1, they all raised a loud cry and they wept that night. After hearing the bad report, after hearing everything that they're up against, even though the spies said it is exactly what God said it was in terms of fruitfulness, when they heard that the people were too mighty and too big, they show a total lack of faith and they begin to weep loudly. We're not talking about some light tears down the face. They are lamenting of where they are at. They are broken and they rebel against God in really six distinct different ways and we're just going to kind of bullet point them.

First, they grumble against God's appointed leaders. They grumble against who God has put before them.

Then they wish that they would have been dead back in Egypt or back in the wilderness which is just mind-blowing to me, right? God has literally delivered them from the hands of a massive army by crushing them with waves of water from the Red Sea and they're saying, "We wish we would have died back there because this army we're going into, they're too much now." It's absolutely ludicrous. They wish they were dead there.

The third thing is they think that God led them to the land to be killed by the sword. So now they're really showing an extremely low view of who God is. They're saying, "God has led us here to kill us," which is the opposite of all of his promises. God has been with them this whole time, sparing them from all sorts of danger and war and calamity. God has been faithful and yet they think God has led them to die.

The fourth thing, they said their wives and children would become prey. It's almost as if they're trying to get the Lord's pity in saying, "You've led us here, now you're going to let our wives and children die. How dare you?"

The fifth thing, they long to go back to Egypt. They see a land before them that God has said, "It's going to be yours, it's flowing with milk and honey. It is incredibly bountiful and fruitful." And they want to go back to Egypt where they're slaves, where they struggled for years and years and years. They want to go back.

The sixth thing is they reject God's appointed leaders and attempt to appoint their own. They reject them and you really see these two bookends: they grumble against the leaders and then they reject them entirely. God has appointed these leaders to lead them but their entire charge is just to point it back to him, that is, God alone that is leading them through the wilderness.

So they reject them. The people rebel against the Lord and they say, "We don't care what your commands are. We don't believe in your promises and we really don't have that large of a view of you. We want to go back." They begin whining like a child who isn't getting their way. The second thing you see flowing from this response is the brokenness of the leaders. Look at verse 5, "Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes." They tore their clothes. Moses and Aaron have fallen on their faces before the Lord. They don't fall on their faces before Israel but before the Lord because they realize who they have sinned against. Israel has sinned against God Almighty, Yahweh. They are rebelling against him and they fall prostrate before God and we will see why in just a moment. And the response of Joshua and Caleb really shows the despair that they were feeling as they tear their clothing. We see later on in the book of Job, Job after he gets the report of all of his family dying, losing everything, tears his clothing and begins to weep loudly. This is really the greatest showing of heartbreak that you saw in the Ancient Near East. They tear their clothing. They are broken over what the people have done.

Then they address the people. They remind the people, they remind Israel that the land is exactly what God has said. So even though the 10 spies have said, "It's not good. We can't do it." Joshua and Caleb, Moses and Aaron, say, "This is exactly what God has said. The land is what it is, it is flowing with milk and honey, it is fertile, it is fruitful and it is healthy and it is ours." So they plead with them not to rebel against the Lord. They are broken, on their faces pleading, "Do not rebel against God. Trust in God. Trust in his faithfulness." Unlike the people, Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb all trusted the promises of Yahweh. They all trusted it. They believed that if God was for them, there was no failure. They had seen it play out throughout their entire lives, God had been for them time and time again, especially in this last year, especially in this last year. Truly God would still be with them now.

This was an urgent time for the people. This is an urgent time for the congregation. They had grumbled against the Lord since leaving Egypt. They keep complaining throughout

the entire journey. Problem after problem after problem God solves but you're almost imagining if God was human, his patience is wearing real thin. He's not human, though. He continues to show his patience and his mercy but he also shows his holiness and his justice in a moment. Their faithlessness might be the last straw, it might be the one that pushes the wrath of God on them. The people cast aside the truth of their leaders, they cast aside what all their leaders have said, how they have called them to faithfulness, and so they attempt to stone them. They say, "We've had enough of this stuff that's coming out of your mouth. We want to have our way. We want to do it our own way. We like our fear. It's a lot better." So they attempt to stone them.

Up until this point, the only thing we've seen from God is him speaking to Moses saying, "Tell the people to do this." God intervenes this time. He steps in. You see the glory of the Lord revealed in the tent of meeting. God has showed up on the scene and at this point you can imagine the Israelites are now shaking in their boots because the last time that God really revealed his glory was at Sinai which is where they're leaving right now and they were fearful of getting anywhere near it. His glory shows up in the tent of meeting. The patience of the Lord has been put to the test the entire encounter. Throughout all of it his patience has been put to the test. His glory is revealed. He is here and he asks this question, "How long will this people despise me? Even though I've done many incredible works, they still fail to trust in me." God is saying, "How long will they despise me? How long will they be like this?" And he shows that their sin has a great consequence. Verse 12, "I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." Their sin has consequences and God gives them a warning, "If you don't relent, if you don't stop being so fearful and faithless, I'm going to strike you off the face of this earth. I'm going to wipe you out and I'll start over with Moses." This is a terrifying time for Israel. Their sin of being fearful and faithless has finally caught up with them. God has been merciful, he has been patient, but will he continue?

The third part of this passage we see is the intercession of Moses. The intercession of Moses. This is a hinge-point not only in our passage this morning but really in the history of Israel. God has just threatened destruction to them saying, "If you do not stop, I will destroy you and start over." Would God wipe them off the face of the earth for their disobedience and their faithlessness? Moses steps in between God and his people. The people are here, God is here, Moses steps in the middle. He intercedes on their behalf. His concern, though, is not for the people. If you'll notice, all of the pleas that he makes before the Lord is not just for the people, it's for the glory of God. He is concerned that God's glory is being profaned on the earth, that through them being wiped out God would be shown to be weak. He is concerned that the nations would see this and say, "This Jewish God is nothing." He is concerned with God's glory and God's glory alone. He pleads for their mercy, the mercy of God. He begs for it. Remember, he is on his face right now, broken over the nature of their sin, falls to the ground and is now pleading for mercy. He recognizes that the Lord is steadfast in love and he pleads for forgiveness. He pleads for the mercy of the Lord.

He knows that punishment will come for these people. He knows that it is coming because God is holy and God is just but he also trusted God will show his love in mercy by being faithful to his covenant. This is a covenant that God swore by his own name in Genesis. He has sworn by his own name to make Abraham's nation a great nation and a blessing to the entire earth. God's name is on the line here. God's name is on the line and Moses intercedes on behalf of the people, calling the mercy of the Lord, calling that God would relent his total wrath on them and show them love. The greatest illustration of this is Christ Jesus. The greatest illustration of this intercession should drive us immediately to thinking on Christ. Jesus went to the cross for sinners such as we are. He went straight to the cross. Though he committed no sin, though there be no blemish on his record, and though he was the Son of the Most High God, he went willingly, willingly for a people that were undeserving.

Friends, we do not deserve the grace of the Lord. We certainly don't deserve Christ. Our sin deserves death and destruction and the glory of the gospel is that Jesus went where we could not. We could not go there. We could not pay the price of our sin so Jesus went willingly. He offered himself as an atonement, the payment for our sin. He spilled his blood. He bore the wrath of God so that we might be set free from the bondage of sin and free from the wrath of God. He did it willingly. He paid the price that we should have paid. He took on our sin and in exchange he gave us righteousness so that God no longer saw our filthy rags, he no longer saw our sin, only the righteousness of Christ. It was imputed to us and the glory continues to get better, it continues to go on because Christ is right now seated far above all of the heavenly places. He did not stay in the ground. He was resurrected, ascended to heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father right now and he is interceding for us. At this moment, Christ is interceding. Far greater than the intercession of Moses. He stands between us and God holding back the wrath, giving out his blood and his righteousness to us. Christ died for our sins. He rose again that we might be justified in union with him and is now pleading our case before the Father on the basis not of our works but of his work.

He is pleading his blood, not what we have done. Christ does not intercede on the basis of what you have done but on his. He does not cease neither to make intercessions for us, and though our sin may be great, his grace is greater still. Christ, even though we are struggling with sin this side of eternity, even though we are wrestling with trials and temptations, he is interceding for us now. He is seated at the right hand of the Father saying, "They belong to me. They're my people and I purchased them." Our salvation is secure in the intercessory work of Christ. We need not pray intercessory prayers to any other because we have one who intercedes for us and that is Christ Jesus. The sole basis of our faith is that we are justified by faith and faith alone, and then the surety of our faith is that is seen in the intercession of Christ alone. We are justified by Christ alone, and surety in salvation is held by him alone.

Don't be like the wicked generation who cast aside the promises of God, who looked at God and said, "We don't want what you offer. We don't want you, we look at ourselves." Don't be like them. Do not turn back on your Christian life for there is no living in the land of the dead. Hebrews warns about this, Hebrews 3 and 4 talks about the wicked

generation that rejected God and therefore did not enter his rest. Ted talked about the rest of God as we were opening in worship this morning, talked about the rest that we have in the promises and the security of Christ Jesus. Don't be like that wicked generation that looked back and saw everything behind them and said, "We want to go there." Don't be like them. Don't look back at your old life and say, "It was better there. It was easier there." Because in Christ we are made new. There is no turning back. He holds us secure. The question is where are you placing your faith? Are you placing it in your own ability or are you placing it in the atoning work of Christ alone? Do you believe that Christ is interceding for you now? This means that you can rest in his truth, you can rest in his promises and know that your salvation is secured for all time. You can rest in his finished work.

The third and final part of our passage this morning is the promise of judgment and the failure of the people. So we see Moses intercede on behalf of his people. He stands in between God and Israel. Christ is the best picture of that intercession for sinners but now we see the promise of judgment. Would the intercession work? God says he pardons them "according to your word." Because of the intercession of Moses, God pardons them, "But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give them." This is the judgment. Sin has consequences. Disobedience has consequences. Faithlessness and sin have consequences so God gives them over to their grumbings. Remember how they said, "We want to go back to Egypt. We wish we would have died there." They grumbled against the leaders. They end up ultimately rejecting the leaders and saying, "We're going to raise up our own leaders to take us back to Egypt."

God gives them over to their grumbings. He does so in several ways. The unfaithful generation will not see the land that God had promised because of their sin. Joshua and Caleb alone are allowed to go in because of their faith. They will not see the land. They're on the border now, they're not going in because of their faithlessness.

The second thing, they are sent back into the wilderness just as they had requested. They said, "We want to go back into the wilderness," so God says, "Go. Because of your unfaithfulness, go." They are then sent back the way of Egypt. It was very interesting. The way that they came, they're sent back. So they said, "We want to go back to Egypt." You're going to go back that way and you will realize just how quickly you don't want to be there.

All of those so in chapter 1 of the book of Numbers, there is a census of the people of Israel from the ages 20 and up. God says, "All of those people in that census, not a one of them is going into the land." Then if you remember, the people had said, "Well, our wives and our children, you just brought them out here to be prey." They're trying to get God to pity them. God reverses it and says, "Your children will see the land, the exact opposite of what you had thought. You thought that they were going to die here. No, they're going to live and I will keep them and they'll see the land and you will die out."

God then said, "They will wander a year for every day that the spies were in the land," about 40 years. And then the wicked spies are killed instantly, taken out by plagues.

God will not be mocked. He will not let sin go unpunished. These wicked people will die out yet God will be faithful to his covenant. God will be faithful and he will keep himself a remnant that will enter the land. He will not wipe them totally out. He keeps a remnant and his promises will not fail. Though we be wicked, God will not fail.

Israel compounds their covenantal faithlessness in the very end of this passage, right? So all of this judgment is being spoken against them, "You will not see the land. You will die in the wilderness. You will wander for 40 years until everyone dies out. You will not see that land." And this people says, "Okay, so we're going to go into the land." After hearing all of that, they say, "No, no, we'll go. We'll go." They thought now that if they tried to save face before God, if they tried to say, "Okay, now we'll be obedient," after he's spoken judgment against them, that God would change his mind, that he would relent and let them go into the land. But as we see, God was not with them in battle. The ark was not with them. Moses did not go with them. He did not go up into battle. Moses is even pleading with these people saying, "You've literally just heard all of this judgment spoken and yet now you're going to be faithful? No, no, God has said you're not going in. Go into the wilderness. Go."

So they try and be obedient now, try and save face and try and go in, and they're absolutely destroyed. The people are defeated in battle. Verse 45, "Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them." So not only do the people try and go in without the authority of the Lord and without the presence of the Lord, but they were absolutely wiped out and sent the other way. They failed because of their unfaithfulness and it almost reminds me of when I was a child. As a child, I was given a set of rules in the household, these are the things that you can do, these are the things that you cannot do. There were rules within my household and I was notorious for trying to find a way around them, or trying to see just how far I could push it before I got in trouble. My family is here and they know that to be the case. I liked to push the boundaries and stretch of what I was able to do. I would try and be sneaky about my disobedience too. I would do things that I knew I shouldn't do because just in my sinfulness I wanted to. Often when I would do something just absolutely boneheaded, especially when I did it when we were out in public, I was great about doing something dumb when we were in public, I would sin against my parents, I would be disobedient to them and the words that I never wanted to hear were, "Your father will deal with you when you get home." You've met my father, he has very large hands and spankings were unpleasant. I heard that, what was my immediate response? I turned into a suck-up. I wanted to try and change the mind of my parents so I acted like I was now obedient. So I know punishment is coming and my thought is, "Let me be really nice to them, let me hug them and tell them how much I love them constantly and maybe, maybe they won't punish me."

This is what Israel has done right now, because when I got home, no matter how much I pleaded, no matter how much I tried to save face, I was punished because sin has

consequences. Disobedience has consequences. My favorite thing to say during that was, "I'm sorry." I'd always say I'm sorry and I thought that was the band-aid that fixed everything. I'm sorry doesn't work if you continue to be disobedient. I'm sorry doesn't work if you just say, "I'm going to continue doing what I'm doing but I'm pretending like I'm sorry." That's not how repentance works and we treat our sin a lot like this. We believe that once we sin or once we get caught in sin, that simply saying I'm sorry to the Lord will suffice but repentance is not merely in asking forgiveness and then continuing on in the same thing, repentance is asking for the forgiveness of the Lord, trusting in the forgiveness of the Lord, and then turning away from our sin. We turn from our sin.

The people of Israel thought that they could regain favor by going where God originally told them to go and now told them not to go. Their sin had consequences and they would serve that by first being defeated in battle, then they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, they struggled, generations started to die out, time and time again they saw that their sin had consequences but God was faithful. God was with them. As we saw last time I preached in Joshua 3 and 4, God ultimately leads the people into the land of promise, right? But something is different this time. The people originally in this passage this morning looked at themselves, looked at their stature, looked at their abilities and said, "There's no way we can go into that land." So they were fearful and faithless but in Joshua we see a different story. God takes them into the land because it is God alone who brings about deliverance and God alone who brings about salvation. Fundamentally different. God leads them into the land. He is faithful to his promises and he will be faithful to his promises to you. And the change for Martin Luther came when he realized that salvation belonged to God and God alone. No amount of confession nor works could ever pay the price of his sin nor our sin, nor gain favor in the eyes of God. We are justified by faith alone and we are held by Christ Jesus who is now interceding for us. To God alone be the glory.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and your truth. We thank you that you have not left us in our sin, that you have sent your Son to die in our place and who is now interceding on behalf of us. Lord, I pray that we would learn lessons from the failings of this people. They exchanged their faith for fear. Lord, I pray that we would be of good courage, that we would see that your word is true, that your promises are true, that you have never failed, and that we would rely on you solely for salvation and for all good things. Lord, I pray that we would step out in obedience as a church saying we know that you have done mighty things and you will continue to do them. I pray that we would be a people that trusts and relies on you and you alone. For your great name's sake we pray in Jesus precious and holy name. Amen.