

Lessons from Exodus 12

Numbers 14

Before we get into the message today I just want to remind you and share with those who weren't at the Bible Study how the Lord is working among us. I was very encouraged – to the point of tears of joy – when several different people shared the same verse as the voice of the Lord to them this week. That was Philippians 4:8. Don't take lightly when the Lord speaks so clearly to us and confirms it by having a number of us on the same verse. He is speaking clearly and you are hearing and letting it change you. The message is to take captive your thought life. God is so wonderful to us and so perfect and caring as our Father that we need to keep our thoughts on the good, praiseworthy, excellent things. That is a part of our change into Christ's likeness. Jesus never worried that his Father wasn't going come through on something and neither should we. He is faithful. Think on **that**. Be anxious for NOTHING!

God led the Israelites a little over a year before taking them to the border of the Promised Land. All along the way there have been lessons of faith, tests to see if they would trust, picture lessons for them to learn about the character of God. At the Jordan River they send 12 spies in to check out the land before they enter. 10 come back and voice their fears and doubts. They had no complaints about the land, it was just what God had promised. "But" they said ... and went on to tell of the obstacles in the way. They said the giant warriors there made them feel as small as grasshoppers. My, aren't we descriptive when we're afraid.

When God directs you and you are certain of his direction, don't say "but". "The Lord has been leading me to get in the word every day, but ..." or how about this one, "I know when I get to this place God is really going to use me but..." The Lord told us to think on good things, but... When God says "Go" the right attitude is "I can". But the whiners, the fearful, those who haven't learned the lessons God has been faithful to teach them over the previous year, they say, "I can't". (13:30,31) Then they proceed to tell you just why it is they can't obey God. It always involves a lack of faith in what God can do.

Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, on the other hand pointed out all the good things in the land and added that God was more than capable of defeating the enemies there. When they fought the Amalekites they saw that God was their Victory. The same enemy is facing them here. The world (Amalekites) does not want you to enter into the rest God has for you and your flesh doesn't want to do battle. In the battle you have to look to God. You have to rely on Him or you die. So the flesh would much rather wander around out here in the wilderness, or better yet go back to the bondage of Egypt.

So the ten turkeys spread a bad report. Think again about their last year – the deliverance from the greatest power in the world – the miracles of provision along the way – the lessons and victories, they've got Joseph's bones with them to bury in the Promised Land. And now these ten faithless fearful rebels are going to talk them out of going in? Surely the people would listen to Caleb and Joshua after all they've been through.

Numbers 14:1-4 (NIV)¹ That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert!³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Surprise, surprise, the people's flesh doesn't want to battle either. So they throw a whine party, probably had some goat cheese to go with the whine. Their hearts have not changed, will not change, and we have to wonder why? What would it take? If they have not seen and heard enough by now there is nothing in the way of physical persuasion that can move these people. They are bent on trusting in the flesh even though they are constantly confronted with the miraculous leading of God. They would prefer to die in the desert than to fight the enemy. Or better yet vote in a man to lead them back into bondage. INCREADIBLE! Fear is a powerful instrument of the flesh.

Num 14:6-10 (NIV)⁶ Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good.⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."¹⁰ But the whole assembly talked about stoning them.

They plead but to no avail. In fact the assembly is so convicted by the faith of these men, they want to stone them to shut them up. Somewhere along this journey these people have hardened their hearts. They will not yield to the Spirit of God, nor will they place their trust in God. They know like Pharaoh knew, God is real and He is Supreme, but they will not bend. "Stiff-necked" God is what calls them. They refuse to turn their head when He calls. What is appropriate justice for people like these?

Num 14:11-12 (NIV) Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites.¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?¹² I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."

That's justice! We've been here before and Moses responds the same way as before. He reminds God of what the world will think. He is concerned about the testimony of God. Then he recounts to God what was said to him when he got a glimpse of God's glory. Numbers 14:17-19 (NIV)¹⁷ "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared:¹⁸ 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'¹⁹ In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now."

The Lord's strength is his incredible mercy blended perfectly with his justice. If the Lord was not so strong He would annihilate them -and us. Mercy triumphs over judgement and the Lord forgives. But He does give them according to what they requested. Remember they whined, "it would have been better if we died in the desert"? God says, OK, if you really want to! Numbers 14:28,29 (NIV) 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say:²⁹ In this desert your bodies will fall--every one of you twenty years old or more... When we grumble we say things that we should never say because Someone is listening. Ever get mad and say "Damn this thing"? And then you can't figure out why it never worked again. Watch out what you ask for, you may get it. Pray God's will. God has your very best interest at heart. His direction is much better than any you could plan for yourself.

Numbers 14:20-24 (NIV)²⁰ The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked.²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth,²² not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times--²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.²⁴ But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

God says no one who treats me with contempt will see the Promised Land. How do we do that? By not turning our stiff-necks when He calls. We take his tests and throw them back at Him, we grumble and whine about obstacles that are there to increase our faith, and we refuse to fight the battles that God has set before us to strengthen and bless us. Refusal to hear, refusal to obey, the foundation of rebellion, the actions of contempt. But – Caleb – he's not like you Israelites, God said. His spirit is different. It is not the unyielding, self-reliant rebel, but one that follows me wholeheartedly. I will bring him in.

Are you like Joshua and Caleb, willing to trust God and enter into the battles, or is your flesh allowed to dominate you with fear? That is treating God with contempt! Let us have a spirit that is different from the world – yielding to the life of Christ in us, ready to march into the battles He lays before us.

The men that gave the bad report died in a plague. The people decided they would go in after all. Facing the giants wasn't quite so bad as 40 years in the wilderness after all. Funny how our perspective changes when we get what we ask for. Moses warns them that it is too late. It was his will until they treated Him with contempt. God is not going to help them in battle now. God has spoken and it is too late now. What was once God's will and time is no longer because of the reaction of people. There is a deep lesson here on God's will changing because of our reaction. We want to go back and do it over but we can't go back, only forward. We will face the lesson again but often in a different form. Still they go to battle (treating God with contempt again) and are defeated. They responded to punishment for rebellion with rebellion. Their hearts are set – they will not change. Death in the desert is the best thing for them.

Psalms 95:6-11 (NIV)⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice,⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.¹⁰ For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways."¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

There is a place of rest for the people of God, but it must be entered into in faith, faith that is willing to fight, faith that will face fears believing that God is able to bring us through. It must be claimed with a faith that believes that what God has promised He will help you to reach. Has God begun a good work in you? Has He promised to complete what He started? Then step into the battle before you believing He is the Victory. Remember the lessons He has shown you on your journey through the wilderness! Have you ever written them down? Have you even dwelt on what they were? If you don't you won't be prepared for what God has ahead of you. He has placed all those lessons and victories in your past to show you who He is and how faithful He is. If you don't cling to those lessons you will cringe at the next battle that comes your way.

I understand now why the Lord had us hold off on this lesson for a couple weeks. Three weeks ago when we heard the Lord tell us Philippians 4:8 we did not know we were about to enter into some tests. Did we hear and obey? Or did we treat God with contempt? I'm not saying this to condemn us but to bring home the point of this passage. We need to cling to what God instructs us for it is for our good to help us through the days we are facing.

See in the Israelites case how important it was to learn the lessons of their past? How different would their outcome have been had they learned to know God as their Provider, their Victory, their Deliverer? Remember the lessons and let them sink into your heart so that you see God for who He is. Those lessons and his word to you are your preparation for the battles ahead.

Hebrews 4:11(NIV)¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.