**Surviving Quarantine Series**

**Discovering 40 Day Episodes in the Bible**

**“Walking by Faith not by Sight”**

**Numbers 13**

**Introduction**

Our current series is “Surviving Quarantine – Discovering 40-Day Episodes in the Bible.” The word “quarantine” comes from two Italian words *quaranta giorni,* which means “40 days.” The Bible has several instances where God used the period of 40 days. So we are entering the third week in our own 40-day journey through the Scripture looking at 7 episodes where God used 40-days to make a spiritual emphasis.

This week we are looking at an episode in the book of Numbers chapter thirteen when Moses sent twelve spies into the land of Canaan to spy out the land. But according to Deuteronomy chapter one the plan to send spies did not originate with Moses, but came from the people. Moses told them, *“You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the Lord our God is about to give to us. See the Lord your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of our fathers, has spoken to you. Do not be afraid or be dismayed.”* (Dt.1.20-21) Moses is being very clear and direct about possessing the land because God Himself has been very clear and direct about possessing the land.

God promised Abraham that as far as his eye could see that He would give Abraham and his descendants this land forever. (Gen.13.14-15) The Lord had told Moses from the burning bush, “*I will bring you out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite . . . to the land flowing with milk and honey*.” (Ex.3.17) And now the Abraham’s descendants stood at the boarder of entering the Promise Land and the people said to Moses, *“Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and the cities which we shall enter.”* (Dt.1.22)

We don’t know why Moses agreed with their request. Maybe he feared a rebellion if he didn’t honor their request. Maybe he thought that hearing a positive report from the spies would rally the people. We don’t know why Moses agreed but he must have gone to the Lord asking how he should send out the spies. Listen to the Lord response, *“Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers’ tribes, every one a leader among them.”* (Num.13.2) Even though Lord knows that the majority of the spies would come back with a negative report and it would be forty years until the sons of Israel would enter the land the Lord is still expresses His commitment to His promise to give the land of Canaan to the sons of Israel. Brothers and sisters, the Lord is faithful even when we are not!

The names of the 12 spies are listed in verses 4-15 of chapter thirteen. Just listen to what some of their names mean. “God is my kinsman.” “God is my Fortune.” “Majesty of God.” “He will redeem.” “God’s deliverance.” Wow! This is another example that we often don’t live up to our name. We are called “Christian” meaning “Christ like.” We should ask ourselves, “Do we live like Christ in this world?” “Do we live up to our name?”

Moses told the spies to enter from the southern boarder and march to the northern boarder. From there they were to turn around and come back basically the same way. Their journey lasted for 40 days and they covered close to 500 miles. But what were to do during this 40-day expedition? Moses told them, *See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. How is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are they like open camps or with fortifications? How is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.* (13.18-20)

Did Moses really wonder if the land was good? Did he doubt that the land was rich? Was he uncertain that there were useful forests? The Lord had already told Moses that the land was *a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey* and Moses had already told the people about the goodness of the land. (Ex.3.8; 13.5) It didn’t matter to Moses if the people living in the land were strong or weak because the Lord was on their side. It didn’t matter to Moses if the people living in tents or fortifications because the Lord would fight their battles. But maybe Moses thought that the 40-day expedition was good because no Israelite had seen the land for over 400 years. And “seeing is believing.” Maybe Moses thought that the faith of these twelve leaders would explode as they walked through the Promise Land witnessing what the Lord had promised to give them.

As these spies toured the land, they saw the people who live there, their cities, and the spectacular produce coming from the land. Produce like clusters of grapes so big, they had to be carried between two men on a pole. After their 40-day journey the spies returned bringing back fruit from the land to show the congregation of Israel. Everyone gathered and this is what they said, *“We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.**Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large;”* (13.27-28)

We went into the land and everything God had promised about the land was indeed true. Nevertheless . . . What?! Nevertheless?! How can one say, “We went to the land, found it good and fruitful, and that all of God’s promise true but despite all that we should forget about entering the land and just go back to Egypt. It’s hard to imagine a report more unbelieving and unfaithful to God than this; a report that recognizes the faithfulness of God’s promise, the truth of His word, and yet says, “Despite all that…”

You know I think that the biggest problem these spies had was their ability to ignore God. Remember these guys witnessed the plagues that God sent to Egypt that led to their release from slavery. These guys saw God rise up the waters of the Red Sea to allow them to walk across on dry land. And then see God collapse the walls of water and destroy the Egyptians. These guys saw the shekinah glory of God resting on Mount Sinai. They heard the Law and ordinances that the Lord gave to Moses. They saw the cloud of the Lord lead them to the southern edge of the Promise Land. They had heard the stories throughout their lives of how God promised this land to Abraham’s descendants. They must have had some element of faith to be chosen as a spy. They saw with their own eyes as they walked through the Promise Land that everything they ever heard about the land was true. But somehow they had the ability to ignore the promises of God.

It isn’t that they didn’t believe in God or understanding His Word but they allowed the people on the other side to overshadow God’s promises. They said, *“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.”*(13.31) Well, it might be true that the people on the other side were too strong for them but the people on the other side were not too strong for God. They were focused on their ability instead of relying on the promises of God. They were walking by sight not by faith.

They must have talked about this during their 40-day expedition. Someone had to have mentioned one night around the campfire, “Wow have you all notice the size of these boys?” I know when I played sports in Junior High and High school we always sized up the other team. But we never said during the warm ups, “Wow those guys look really big lets call of the game.” What do you think our coach would have said if we submitted our request to not play because of the size of the opponent before the game started? “Hey coach, the boys and I were talking and we think these guys are too big for us the handle.” Let me just tell you I would have been kicked off the team right then and there. My coach would rather suit up the cheerleaders before forfeiting the game.

As they walked through the Promised Land these spies must have had discussions about how God would fight for them as He did in Egypt. How God would not have brought them this far only to fail them now. But somewhere within the 40-days something shifted in their faith. Somehow the majority of the spies came to the conclusion that the people on the other side were bigger than the promises of God. This shift in their faith is summarized in verse thirty-three, “*we became like grasshoppers in our own sight.*” Ignoring God’s promise had brought them to a low estimation of themselves.

Currently we are facing a lot of uncertainty due to Covid-19. Like the spies we have never seen things like this before. And now we stand at the boarder wondering what lies in wait on the other side. Of course, no one really knows but we cannot be like these spies and allow what lies on the other side to overshadow the promises of God for His people! We cannot and should not ignore the promises of God to bless us, keep us, and to make His face to shine upon us.

At that moment these spies finished giving their negative report every man of faith in Israel should have cried out and said, “Nevertheless nothing!” And thank God two of the spies did just that! Caleb and Joshua spoke words of faith in the midst of unbelief. Caleb said, *“We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.”* (13.30) And Joshua said, *“The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.”* (14.7-9) Many of you know that Barbara and I named our two sons Caleb and Joshua in honor of these two men of faith and in hope that they would emulate their faith.

Caleb and Joshua had the spirit of Romans 3.4: *Let God be true but every man a liar*. It might be true that the ones on the other side are stronger than we are but to say, “we are not able to go up against the people” is a lie. It is true that the ones on the other side live in large fortified cities but to say that God is not able to destroy fortresses is a lie. It is true that the ones on the other side are men of great size but to say that we are grasshoppers in their sight is a lie. Brothers and sisters let God be true and every man a liar. If God is for us who can be against us?

All twelve of the spies saw the same people, the same cities, and the same vegetation. All twelve walked the same roads during the same 40-days, saw the same streams, and ate the same grapes. Two came away singing songs of faith and the other ten walked away filled with a sense of certain doom. Brothers and sisters faith does not spring from circumstances or the environment, but it springs from our hearts, which God must change.

God must change our hearts from ignoring His promises to claiming His promises. God must change our hearts like He did to the father in Jesus’ day who had a son who from childhood had been possessed by a spirit that not only made him mute but who cause him to go into convulsive fits and throw himself in the fire. The father came to Jesus and said, *“But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” And Jesus said to him, “‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.”* *Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”*Jesus restored the boy to perfect health. (Mk.9.17-27) And maybe more importantly the father’s faith was as well. To survive quarantine we must seek the Lord to help our unbelief.

**Closing Thoughts**

Brothers and sisters to survive quarantine we must embrace God’s promises. We should not ignore God’s promises. Or allow anything to become bigger than the promises of God. Lets ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts to determine if we live up to our name – Christian – Christ-like.

Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to not allow what lies on the other side to overshadow the promises of God. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to make us like Caleb and Joshua. Willing to stand up and say, “*Let God be true but every man a liar*.” And if we are going through a bad patch lets ask the Holy Spirit to give us the spiritual transparency to say, *“I do believe; help my unbelief.”* Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts so we can walk by faith and not by sight.