

*Sermon on Numbers 13, 14 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

**Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-33, 14:1-12**

**Living by faith is not easy but it is good.**

What are you afraid of?!

What worries you? What keeps you from acting on what you know is right?

*The Chapman University Survey of American Fears* may shed some light...

Top tens fears of Americans in 2022: (all more than 50%)

10. Biological Warfare
9. Pollution of oceans, rivers, and lakes
8. Economic/financial collapse
7. Not having enough money for the future
6. Pollution of drinking water
5. The U.S. becoming involved in another world war
4. People I love dying
3. Russia using nuclear weapons
2. People I love becoming seriously ill
1. Corrupt government officials

Five spheres of fear, corrupt government, harm to loved ones, war, environmental concerns, and economic concerns.

I wish we had more of the data to ask “what do Christians fear?”

We are the people able to claim... **2 Timothy 1:7** “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”. (ESV)

Still though, I look in the mirror, in light of my own sin, under the weight of caring for my family, the task of leading the church, and I wonder, “what are you afraid of?”

In our study of Numbers we have thought deeply of who we trust, of what our treasure is and how life is lived in light of these truths. And again, we come to maybe the most well-known event in Numbers and see a bold contrast between fear and faith.

It is timely for us.

Given the landscape of our time, the wilderness of life after COVID, distrust of institutions, change trajectory of the future; a key reason we are studying Numbers!

Also, as we begin to think of “moving the camp,” relocating as a church. Praying, wondering where our promised land is supposed to be!

One of our elders last week described what he sensed was and “inflection point” for us as a church. “A time of significant change in a situation; a turning point.” Or if you prefer to think about it mathematically, since he is a physicist, “a point of a curve at which a change in the direction of curvature occurs.”

Yet we are faced with the question, will fear tamper boldness, attempt to eliminate risk, or will faith move the needle?

Living by faith is not easy but it is good... That’s a pretty tame big idea... Good should actually be amazing! This is what you were meant for!!

So what do we see in this story?

The people of God, Israel are camped in Paran, on the edge of the promised land. They have just come off of complaining and correction. The mercy of God applied.

The Lord has Moses send spies - 12, one from each tribe - to scope out the land, to see what is theirs.

Everyone on that trip sees the same things. And it’s amazing. But not everyone, actually most, don’t want to go. It’s the difference between fear and faith. What fear misses, and What faith understands.

## **What Fear Misses**

Everyone, all of the spies, saw the same thing.

**Numbers 13:21–24** “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 Talmi, 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.” (ESV)

Valley of Clusters... how cool is that. They found a cluster of grapes so large two of the men carried it. They had pomegranates and figs. It was a fruitful land.

Notice also, they traversed all the way north and back and faced no opposition or harm in this expedition.

And they report back what they saw. They show the fruit and confirm it's a land flowing with milk and honey. It is really good.

This is the promise. Where their redemption was destined to deliver them.

But... “however, the people there are strong with fortified cities... so many to subdue.”

One of the spies, Caleb, tries to stir them to action... **Numbers 13:30** “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.” (ESV)

But the other men say “we can't do it, they are too strong.” And they bring a bad report. They say they were like grasshoppers in the land, small and insignificant.

These are the leaders, representing each tribe, and they let fear rule and it spreads to the people.

More grumbling against Moses and Aaron. Crying out “we will die!” “It is better back in Egypt!” In fear they desire to find someone else to follow who would take them back into slavery.

Now, before we are too hard on Israel, let’s see our reflection in their faces.

I mean they had reasonable fear. Archeological digs from the era prove the cities had substantial walls, that the people were big and vast numbers of them were in the land.

If Israel were to go into the land to take it for themselves, some would die by the sword.

And what about the kids?! When they say “our wives and our little ones will become prey,” they aren’t wrong.

Fascinating to see this unfold. They are between in this moment. Between where they were (slavery, bondage and oppression) and where they were supposed to be (promise). Yet they prefer status quo or regression over continuing where they belong. After all it's what they know and are comfortable with.

“The Israelites should be marching into the promised land with full faith in the Lord. Instead, they continue in disbelief (chs. 11–12) with a full-scale revolt against the Lord. Those who reject the Lord’s covenant promises will not enjoy his covenant blessings.”

Fear rules the day.

We are like this... maybe not you, but I am.

- Commotion of the world and worry weigh me down.
- Don’t take the Lord at his word.
- Prefer what is “comfortable” over what is stretching, even when I know what is right.
- Oh, and the kids - what might they miss out on, I can’t put them in strange and dangerous spaces for the glory of Christ!

“Your fears always are attached to those things which you make your security instead of God. They attach to your idols, and, therefore, fear is always really a fear of failure.” Timothy J. Keller

But I want you to know, I am resolved today to not live in fear.

Because fear misses something here and I can't miss it. I don't want your to miss it either.

“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.”

All fear sees is self. Not wrong but forgets who they are, whose they are.

What faith understands (not to that point yet but a bit of a spoiler)...

Joshua and Caleb get it. They tear their clothes... **Numbers 14:7–9** “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.” (ESV)

Yahweh delights in us. Do not rebel against Yahweh. Fear rejects, rebels against the Lord. To rebel against God and to be scared of the people is the same thing. To be scared of the people when God says, “Go do that,” to be scared of it is to rebel against him. It's not two different things. It's the same thing.

“When the people ascribe death and destruction to God by suggesting that he had led them purposefully into the wilderness to die, they disparage his essential life-giving character.” R. Dennis Cole

The glory of the Lord appears and he says he is ready to strike them and disinherit them.

Moses intervenes and pleads for mercy. He calls on God's reputation and character the save the people.

**Numbers 14:15–19** “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.” (ESV)

God pardons but promises that none of the men that spoke against him will not see the promised land. In fact, the whole generation will die in the wilderness.

**Numbers 14:31–34** “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.” (ESV)

The spies, all except Joshua and Caleb, die of a plague for bringing the bad report. The people realize their mistake and in rebellion try to go into the land and are defeated. It’s no longer that generation’s promise.

Fear still tries its best, as a tool of the accuser, to keep us from promise.

“When you are afraid of anything, when you are afraid you won’t have money because money is your security, when you’re afraid you won’t have your looks because your looks is your security, when you’re afraid you won’t have somebody to be hanging on their arm because a relationship is your security, when you’re afraid of this or you’re afraid of that, don’t you see, what you’re doing is you are giving more weight to that than to God. You are treating him with contempt. When you’re afraid of anything, what you’re really saying is, “God is a small thing, smaller than this. This is bigger. This is more than God can handle.” TJK

Fear misses the promise. Fear misses God. Fear misses the reality of his care, of his word.

There is another way.

### **What Faith Understands**

We know this, faith understand it is God that delivers us, who brings us into the land.

**Numbers 13:30** “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.” (ESV)

**Numbers 14:8–9** “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.” (ESV)

And the fruit of faith?

**Numbers 14:24** “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.” (ESV)’

From the word of God, his promise, faith acts.

What promises have you been fearful to believe? His provision? His keeping? His sanctifying work in you?

The righteous live by faith and that is our calling. To trust in the Lord, to believe him, to live in light of him.

“Courage, really, and faith, in the Bible, aren’t really different. Courage is considered a moral trait, along with love, along with patience, along with honesty. It’s a moral character, and it’s something God expects from us.”

And what's more, and this is good, when we don't live courageously, when fear gets the best of us, we have an advocate, we have a sure inheritance that won't be taken away. Because another faced fear for us.

Jesus in the garden. His ministry coming to a close, his hour had come. He invites men to scope out the land in prayer with him and he sees giants...

**Luke 22:39–44** “And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. [40] And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” [41] And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, [42] saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” [43] And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. [44] And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (ESV)

Death before him. The agony of taking on sin. Fully meeting wrath. But knowing what it would produce, he chose the Father's will.

Because Jesus acted in faith, we can now. Because he took on our sin and its punishment, because he gave us his righteousness, his inheritance, his life, we can live with faith in him and his purpose for us.

**Isaiah 41:10** “fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (ESV)

**Deuteronomy 31:6** “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” (ESV)

**John 14:27** “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (ESV)

**Psalms 118:6** “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”



**Luke 12:32** “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (ESV)

Faith sees the promise and lives accordingly.

Life in the wilderness, full of trials and hardships, exposes our hearts—are they hardened by difficulties so that we want to turn back, or purged by them so that we long all the more to press onward into the heavenly land held out before us? When by faith we look to Christ, who in the wilderness lived on God's word, who died and lives as our Mediator to assure us of God's steadfast love to us, and who by his Supper feeds us with the powers of the age to come, we are strengthened to endure the journey of faith marked out before us.

And the results will be glorious.

Tim Keller on leading a church in NYC “Why am I afraid of failure? Do I live by my performance, or by the grace and righteousness of Christ? Have I gotten this far on the basis of my efforts, and my smarts, and on the basis of my discipline, or have I come here sheerly by the grace and righteousness of Christ? What if God is calling me to fail anyway? So what? I have his love. I have his kindness, and if he does call me to fail here, he will only use this failure to prepare me for something he knows is better for me. My worthiness is not in my success. The reason I'm scared is because I have held onto this life raft, but Jesus is my security, and as a result, I don't have to worry about the failure here; I'm free from that.”

What will you risk?

How will you respond?

How will we march to our Valley of Eshcol?

“We stand between the Promised Land and Egypt. Between the abundant suffering and joy God offers to those obedient to the call to make disciples of all nations. And between the seductive promises of comfort, freedom, and security that come with shackling ourselves back onto our proverbial little Egypts...We can choose to recall the taste of the grapes that are God's promises, and thereby lean into Him as our refuge and strength as we go about his business. Or we can

back away from the task, mistaking all of the risks and challenges as ones we have to meet and overcome ourselves.” Ben Todd

### **Living by faith is not easy but it is good.**

Some fear has a point - it seems so real. Jesus however, calls us to see him, to understand his purpose in us, his power for what lies ahead.

It makes me think of my children being scared of jumping into the pool for the first time. Their Daddy was ready to catch them, urging them on. Learning how fun it is.

I want to hear my father’s voice and jump into his arms... into his promise, a life lived from the finished work of Christ for his fame.

We begin with confession: (Daily Prayer) Say it with me.

*“Most merciful God, I confess that I have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done, and by what I have left undone.*

*I have not loved you with my whole heart; I have not loved my neighbors as myself. I am truly sorry and I humbly repent.*

*For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on me and forgive me; that I may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen”*

Ask for help to live by faith. His Spirit in you. Reminding, encouraging, spurring you on.

There is something bigger than fear. His name is Jesus.

Shall we see the land and go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it, because the favor of the Lord is upon us by the blood of Christ.

Faith for his fame.

My friend Ben made me aware of a simple, beautiful song by Brian Wages called Grapes from Canaan. Ben doesn't know whether it was precisely his intent, but for us his lyrics capture the invitation offered by the grapes of the Valley of Eshcol precisely:

“Have you seen the grapes from Canaan land?

They give us hope for what lies just ahead

And I know there are giants there.

And I know there are giants there.

And I know there are giants there.

But I don't care.

Would you go with me?”