

## The Greatest Story (Part 7):

The Wilderness of Unbelief

*Numbers 13-14*

*Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 1:7*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

There is nothing that pleases God more than faith. Through the creation story God shows us his Glory. Through his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob he shows his Grace. Through his restoration of Joseph he shows his goodness. And, in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt he shows us his greatness. But it's one thing to see and another thing entirely to experience, to partake of. As easily as we can see the glory, grace, goodness, and greatness of God, we can just as easily miss out on experiencing it internally. **We only inherit God's glory, grace, goodness, and greatness through one way... faith.** It is by faith that Abraham was credited with the righteousness of God. It was by faith that Joseph persevered and was blessed. It was by faith that Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. Faith is the only way we can have a relationship with the God of the universe. By faith we must obey him as our Lord and leader and by faith we must trust in the substitutionary atonement of Christ.

For the past two weeks we've been talking about placing our faith in the substitutionary atonement of Christ. We've seen how the blood of the lamb caused the destroyer to pass over those who trusted in it's protection and painted it on their doorposts. And just this past week we saw how the day of atonement was established so that one day a year the priest would consecrate himself and enter into the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and offer the blood of the lamb on behalf of the sins of the entire nation. One day a year God would look at the blood of the lamb and forgive the people's sins if they would trust in his atonement.

And now we know this... Christ is that lamb. If we have the blood of Christ covering us then the wrath of God passes us over. If we trust in the shed blood of Jesus to pay for our punishment then our sins are forgiven...and not just for one year... but forever. **Ephesians 1:7**, our memory verse for the past week tells us that if... We place our faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and it brings us into a relationship with God.

So faith in God is extremely important. **Placing our trust in him in obedience is our greatest expression of worship.** So it comes as a surprise to us, that after having seen the Glory, Grace, Goodness, and Greatness of God revealed in ways that we have never seen, the Israelites continue to doubt God. It seems that at some point in every leg

of their journey in the wilderness the Israelites begin to complain, whine, turn their backs on and even curse God. The Hebrews in the wilderness show us that keeping faith is extremely hard. In **Exodus 16** they complain about being hungry in **verse 3**. They fear starvation so God sends them Mana. In **Numbers 11**, perhaps a half a year to a year later, the people are sick of mana. Look at **verses 4-6**. They fear regularity so God sends them quail. Then, as if all the people losing faith isn't enough, in Numbers 12 Moses' own brother and sister turn on him, gossiping about him behind his back because they are afraid that Moses' may have chosen the wrong wife? Silly right? Still, do you see a pattern here? Fear is the enemy of faith. And the Israelites are consistently being motivated by fear rather than faith. Moses isn't wrong in telling God that the Israelites are a stiff necked people.

I'm pretty stiff-necked at times. I remember a time when a guy came to deliver and install our new storm door for the front porch. I remember specifically that God was impressing upon me to strike up a conversation with him about church and God and share the Gospel with him if possible. I sat there paralyzed by fear on my couch. I watched him work for 20 minutes and then I watched him leave... for whatever reason, scared to death... my neck very stiff.

We too are a stiff-necked people. Stiff-necked means to be stubborn or not to be led. It derives from the steering of Oxen. The plowman would use the ox-goad to hit the Ox in the neck to make him change direction. And oxen who would get hit by the goad and not change direction were called... stiff-necked. Sometimes the Oxen would get scared by something and no amount of hitting them with the Goad would get them back on track. How many times does God try to change our direction and we keep going our own way? How many times does he say, just trust me I know what I'm doing, and we say... Yeah God, that's way too scary, or nah God... I got this? Let this sink in.... you are either faithful to God's leading or you are stiff-necked. Look at **Galatians 3:9**. The faithful will be blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. But the opposite is also true.

**Matthew 7:21** says that the unfaithful will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Today's story shows us this with extreme clarity. Faith in God will lead you to the promised land, but a lack of faith and obedience will lead you to the wilderness. In our Journey through the Bible we come to a place today where God had led the Israelites to the promised land and he has told them to enter into it... will they be faithful or not?

Let's read together starting in **Numbers 13:1-3, 17-21, 25-28, 30-33, 14:1-38**.

Today, God is trying to show us a simple principal. **We can either be led by fear which enslaves or by faith which sets free.**

## Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

So let's dig in to this passage of scripture and see how the fearful see obstacles too big to overcome but the faithful see a God who can overcome any obstacle. The first thing we see is... **The Fearful See Obstacles Too Big To Overcome.** Look... when God calls men to do something, the fearful dismiss the pros and emphasize the cons. Look again at **Nu. 13:26-28**. 12 spies went to look at the promised land. 10, regardless of the great things they saw were too afraid to take the land. It didn't matter that the grapes were huge and the fruit was overwhelmingly good. If you look back a few verses it says that one cluster of grapes was so big that it had to be carried on a pole between two men. That's crazy! It was also a land that is known as one flowing with milk and honey. Meaning... this was a really good land. Better than Egypt... and much better than the desert wilderness. But none of that mattered to these 10 because all they could see were the obstacles in the way. Look at a very key word here... "however." None of the goodness mattered... all that mattered was their fear. All they could see was that the people were strong and their cities were large and fortified.

And here is where we need to recognize a few things. Yes, people can be intimidating and it can be very scary to confront them. But that's life. People will always be a part of your life and you have to get beyond your fear to a place where you can have any conversation, and any confrontation that is necessary. At some point you have to stop being afraid of people. Also, cities are big and so is the world. Whatever situation God has called you to... it will seem big. Why? Because if it were small then you wouldn't need his help and God wants you to depend on him. In God's eyes, **anything too easy to do without God's help isn't really worth doing.** The fearful dismiss the pros and emphasize the cons. Don't allow fear to keep you from seeing the blessing God is calling you to.

Another thing... the fearful always seem to make things seem worse than they really are. Look again at **Nu. 31-33**. So at first it was just "the people are strong," but now it is "they are stronger than we are." We don't know that for a fact... and more than likely that wasn't the truth but their fear caused them to see things wrong. They embellished their obstacles. At first they had "strong and fortified cities," but now it is a land that "devours its inhabitants." Also not true. How can the people be strong and also devoured? And then we see here that it goes from a tall people to a people so tall that it makes the Israelites look like grasshoppers. And obvious embellishment. The people may have been big... maybe even giants the size of Goliath, but that should not stop the people of God... remember it didn't stop David. Fear messes with your head and makes you see things that aren't there.

Another thing fear does is it disrupts relationships. The fearful cause panic and division. Look again at **Nu. 1-4, 10**. The people wept all night in fear of something that they hadn't seen themselves and was embellished by a few cowards. It's pretty silly isn't it. But how many times have we been there? Scared of something we aren't even sure of.

And then this fear leads to grumbling and complaining against their leaders Moses and Aaron. Fear can make you turn on trustworthy leaders. It's amazing that someone can follow a pastor or boss who has never led them astray and then as soon as they ask them to step out in faith to do something bigger than themselves... it scares them and they turn on them.

And then they wanted to go back to Egypt. It's so dumb. It's like a kid who is always threatening to run away. They aren't going to do it... cause they would die. The Israelites aren't going back to be slaves in Egypt, they just keep saying it to make be mean to Moses and throw it in God's face. But isn't that what fear does... fear makes us think that failed endeavors of our past look appealing again. It's like the church who would rather go back to a traditional way of church that wasn't reaching people with the Gospel or disciplining believers but was easier and more comfortable. We can never go back to something that didn't work, something that God has delivered us from. But that's what fear does... it makes us want the comfort of slavery more than the blessing of the unknown.

And then lastly... they wanted to kill Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua. They wanted to get rid of anyone that was calling them to have faith and move forward to where God had called them. I mean... things really escalated fast. They went to following Moses and trusting God to take the land, to hearing an embellished report from cowards, to turning on their leaders and trying to kill them. And doesn't this sound just like the words of the great theologian Yoda; **"fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering"**. Not our memory verse for the day... or in the Bible at all... but still true. Fear always leads to broken relationships... and can possibly lead all the way to murder. Be careful that you do not let fear take you too far.

Lastly, the fearful are prone to wander in uncertainty. Look at **Nu. 14:22-23, 32-33**. God steps in... and at first he wants to kill all the Israelites, but then Moses intercedes and says... God... how will you get glory for leading your people out of Egypt if you kill them now. So God relents. But he still deals out a stiff punishment. He says everyone over the age of 20 will die in wilderness. For 40 years they will wander around in a desert not having a permanent home, not having a place of their own, and living day to day off of the provisions of God. God makes it clear... I brought you out of slavery in Egypt but you still want to be enslaved by fear in this desert. So be it. Because they rejected God and didn't take the land, their fear became their prison. Get this... **The fears we don't face become our limits in this life.** Whatever fears you don't overcome in this life will become walls in this

life you cannot get past... too many walls and you are enclosed and enslaved. So what do we do? Well.... **We can either be led by fear which enslaves or by faith which sets free.**

So, don't be a slave to fear, instead have faith... because **The Faithful See A God Who Can Overcome Any Obstacle.** The faithful know one thing the fearful don't. That our God is bigger than any fear we have. He can conquer any fear we have. In him we can find the courage to overcome any obstacle.

You see... the faithful recognize when the positives outweigh the negatives. Look at what Caleb and Joshua say in **Nu 13:30** – “we can overcome it.” And in **Nu 14:7** “It is an exceedingly good land.” They didn't care about the obstacles... they only cared about the blessing that God had promised. God's blessings outweigh the trials... every time.

The faithful also fear God more than they fear men. In **Nu 14:8-9** Caleb and Joshua implore the people to not rebel against the Lord even though they know the people are about to stone them. Why? Because they recognize, just as the apostles did, that to die is better than to rebel against God. I think we struggle with this... because we think... i'm just scared, God understands and he won't mind. NO! I get that you are scared... but you have no choice but to overcome your fear... because... **when we refuse to do what God has called us to do because of fear.. it isn't merely a problem... it's sin!**

Most importantly... the faithful depend on God. Caleb & Joshua knew that God could do what he said he could do and they depended on him to do it. They didn't place their trust in themselves... but their God who gives them strength. And then in **Nu 14:19** we see Moses intercedes on behalf of the fearful and depends on God to spare their lives. The only way we can have faith in God is to depend on God. It is true... the fearful see obstacles too big to overcome, the faithful see a God who can overcome any obstacle. And so you have a choice... **We can either be led by fear which enslaves or by faith which sets free.**

### Application (Resolution, You)

You all know this verse... or you will. It is our memory verse for the week. **2 Tim 1:7** says God has not give us a spirit of fear. You see... the Holy Spirit in you gives you confidence and boldness and courage, and power and strength which overcomes fear. So this morning let me ask you a few questions.

What has God specifically called you to do in His word that you are afraid to do? Perhaps it is the big one.... witnessing and evangelizing the lost. You know God commands it of you. You know specific people that God has placed on your heart and in your life that need to know him.

Yet you keep putting it off because of fear. Maybe it is beginning new relationships for the sake of evangelism. Perhaps you aren't a people person... maybe you are an introvert and you are scared of putting yourself out there, but you know God wants you to befriend someone for the sake of the Gospel. Maybe it's the call to disciple or mentor another believer. You know that you are capable to lead someone through a study or become their prayer partner but you are scared of what you might have to give up. Or perhaps its the call to tithe and give offerings to God. Perhaps you are scared of the hit it would give to your budget. Perhaps you only have enough money as it is to get through each month... and you don't think you could ever give 5 percent much less 10 percent to the church. You know it's what God wants you to do but you are scared. What are the things that you specifically know God commands of you that you are scared of this morning?

The next question is this... what has God called you to do in your personal ministry that you are afraid to do? I don't know what that is specifically but perhaps it is to reach out to a specific neighbor or start a non-profit ministry or go back to school or trust God with only one income because you know God wants your wife to stay home and homeschool the kids. Whatever it is... what fear is holding you back. Are you afraid of what people may think or say? Are you afraid that the job is too big for you? We've all been there... but faith is the overcoming of our fears. So are you able to trust god to help you overcome the obstacles in your way?

And lastly, how have you seen the effects of fear in your own life? Do you tend to be more negative than positive? Do you allow the negatives in life to overwhelm the positives? Has fear made you a negative person? Does your fear cause you to panic and blow things out of proportion? Or perhaps... you have caused divisions or become angry at people because of fear?

It's time to stop being afraid and be faithful to God. You see... because of their fear to enter the Land that God had given them, the Israelites were enslaved in the wilderness for 40 years and many of them died there never seeing the promised land. But those who had faith; Joshua and Caleb, they entered in and prospered there for many years to come. You don't have to wander in the wilderness of unbelief anymore. **We can either be led by fear which enslaves or by faith which sets free.**

### Conclusion

Have you ever heard about the difference between cows and buffalo when it comes to fear? You see when a storm is headed towards a large herd of cows the cows will get scared and almost always try to outrun the storm. But cows aren't fast... they are really slow and as they try to outrun the storm they actually end up being in it longer as they move with the

storm. But buffalo aren't scared of the storm. They have an innate belief inside that tells them to run into the storm instead of away from it. That way they will get through the storm faster. So... are you a cow or a buffalo? Husbands don't you dare call your wife a cow. But for real, are you running in fear or moving forward in faith. Are you spending more time in the storm than need be because of fear or are you overcoming the storm with faith. Remember... the fearful see obstacles too big to overcome, the faithful see a God who can overcome any obstacle... so we have a choice to make... **We can either be led by fear which enslaves or by faith which sets free.**