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Today—

will I merely be a hearer of God's truth?
Or will I listen attentively, take to heart
what I hear, and be transformed in my
thinking so that I can fulfill God's
complete plan for my life?

James 1.22-25; Matthew 7.24, 26; Roman 12.2

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2023

Choosing Failure

Numbers 13-14

A new year . . . or just the same old one?

A Generation's Greatest Opportunity

- The people of Israel had come to the most pivotal moment in their lives, individually and collectively– the fulfillment of a 400 year old promise of God intended for their generation.

The LORD said to Moses,

“Send some of the men to explore the land of Canaan [the land I promised on oath to their forefathers], which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.”

Numbers 13.1 (with 14.23)

- Like the links in a chain, previous generations (e.g. Joseph) had lived in expectation of the promise made generations earlier (Abraham) being fulfilled in a specific future generation. This was their “once-in-a-lifetime” moment.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”

Genesis 50.24-25

- Despite all they had experienced of God's faithfulness in their day-to-day concerns, they had never really learned to trust Him, or to respond in faith to His next steps for their lives.

Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night. Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron . . . "Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn't it be better for us to return to Egypt?"

Numbers 14.1-3

*When faced
with the
challenges of
their greatest
moment—
the greatest
opportunity
in generations—
they choked!*

The Tragedy of Forgetfulness

- The people of Israel did not learn anything from the miracles which they saw the LORD God perform in obtaining their release from slavery to the Egyptians.

*Our ancestors in Egypt were not impressed
by the LORD's miraculous deeds.*

They soon forgot his many acts of kindness to them.

Instead, they rebelled against him at the Red Sea.

Psalm 106.7

*Unlike normal
forgetfulness,
spiritual
forgetfulness
is not merely
a nuisance.
Invariably,
it results in
catastrophic
spiritual failure.*

- Israel's tragic failure, and ultimate act of idolatry, was to reduce the purposes of God to their personal concerns.

They spoke against God, saying,

“Can God really spread a table in the wilderness?

*When he struck the rock, water gushed out,
and streams flowed abundantly.*

But can he also give us bread?

Can he supply meat for his people?”

Psalm 78.19-20

- Consequently, they were spiritually unprepared and unable to trust God when presented with their greatest opportunity and the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promises.

*Then they despised the pleasant land;
they did not believe his promise.*

*They grumbled in their tents
and did not obey the Lord.*

*So he swore to them with uplifted hand
that he would make them fall in the wilderness,
make their descendants fall among the nations . . .*

Psalm 106.24-26

- Understand this: God is not acting merely in response to your immediate needs; He is pursuing **His** plan according to His covenant promises and purposes—
 - ➔ in your **life**,
 - ➔ as part of this **generation**,
 - ➔ within the scope of **human history**,
 - ➔ according to His **eternal purposes**.

*But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of His heart through all generations.*

Psalm 33.11

The Deadliness of Flawed Eyesight

- Moses, Joshua, and Caleb saw potential problems, and even impossibilities, in the light of God's faithfulness and power to perform His promises. The people never developed the eyesight of faith.

"We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are . . . All the people we saw there are of great size . . . We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Numbers 13.31-33

- To lack the faith to see impossibilities in the light of God's promises is to treat the Lord with contempt—to denigrate His integrity, His faithfulness to His word.

“How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? Not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

Numbers 14.11, 23

*“But my
righteous one
will live by faith.
And I take no
pleasure
in the one who
shrinks back.”*

Hebrews 10.38

What Will We Choose?

- It is possible to experience grace and God's provision throughout life but never fulfill God's ultimate purposes.

The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them . . . [but] your bodies will fall in this wilderness. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you."

Numbers 14.20, 32-34

For the next forty years, there would be manna every morning, but they would never see God's best for them in their lifetimes.

- Remember: Israel's greatest idolatry was to reduce the plan and purposes of God to the mere provision of their personal concerns.
- In this spirit of idolatry, they were more willing for their children to be slaves of the world system in Egypt than to share in the inheritance promised to Abraham: the salvation of the nations. Tragically, that same idol-spirit persists in the mindsets of most Christians.

*God is not
glorified by our
sufficiency
or success.
If this is enough
for us,
we choose to fail
in His purposes
for us.*

- God's ultimate plan is the salvation of people from every tribe, language, and nation. This is the inheritance that He has for His Son and for us as co-heirs with Christ. What are you choosing as your inheritance? The inheritance of your children?
- Every prayer God has answered and every promise He has made, is intended to ⁽¹⁾ show the integrity of His faithfulness, ⁽²⁾ strengthen our faith to trust Him for the unknown, ⁽³⁾ enable us to embrace His impossible purposes for us.

*Now to Him
who is able to do
immeasurably
more
than all we ask
or imagine,
according to
His power
that is at work
within us.*

Ephesians 3.20

- In recounting the history of this generation, we read this sad epithet in Psalm 78—

In spite of His wonders, they did not believe.

So He ended their days in futility.

This generation had everything going for it: the timing, promises, miracles, the manifest glory of God. No other generation had greater evidence that “if God is for us, who could be against us?” And yet they never learned to really trust God; instead of becoming history’s greatest example of faith, they became the prime example of failure.

*Faith must be
indispensable
or failure
is inevitable.*