

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



A Collapse of Courage

KEY PASSAGE: Numbers 13-14 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Deuteronomy 31:6 | Joshua 1:9

SUMMARY

Oftentimes people work very hard to achieve a particular goal, yet at the edge of seeing their dream come to pass, they miss it.

One of the reasons is because they don't have the courage to grasp what God has provided. They may have even prayed and hoped that He would answer, but when He does, their courage collapses.

SERMON POINTS

Courage is the quality of mind or spirit enabling one to meet danger or face opposition or the challenges of life with fearlessness, calmness, and firmness. The story in Numbers 13-14 is an illustration of what happens when we lose our courage and fail to follow through in full obedience to the Lord.

Israel's Situation

After God had miraculously rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, parted the Red Sea for their escape, and led them through the wilderness to Mount Sinai, He gave them His law that was to govern their nation and their worship. From there, He led them across the desert until they arrived at the edge of the land He'd promised to give them.

At this point, the Lord told Moses to select twelve leaders from each of the tribes to spy out the land and return with a report (13:1-2). The spies came back with a sample of the fruit—some figs, pomegranates, and a single cluster of grapes so big that it was carried on a pole between two men. The land was certainly fruitful and productive. However, the cities were large and strongly fortified, and the people were extremely strong. The spies even reported seeing giants there.

The Spies' Reports

Because God had promised to give the Israelites the land, Caleb said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it" (13:30). But ten of the spies discouraged the people by giving a bad report. Instead of remembering God's promise and power, these spies focused on the situation and raised the following objections.

- "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us" (v. 31).
- "The land . . . devours its inhabitants" (v. 32).
- "We became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (v. 33).

As a result of the negative report, the people wept, grumbled, and accused the Lord of bringing them to this land "to fall by the sword" (14:3). They wanted to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb and appoint another leader to take them back to Egypt. How quickly they forgot their previous slavery and God's supernatural work on their behalf.

The Reasons for the Collapse of Courage

The Israelites came to the wrong conclusion for several reasons.

- **They forgot God's promise.** Although the Lord had promised to give them the land, the people let the negative reports overshadow and diminish what God had said.
- **They focused on their resources rather than the Lord's.** Looking at their own abilities, they saw no way to defeat the people of the land. But God has the power to do whatever is required to fulfill His promises whether we understand His ways or not.
- **They chose to listen to doubters rather than believers.** When the people rejected the counsel

of the two men who believed God would empower them to defeat their enemies, but instead listened to the spies who doubted Him, they made a disastrous decision. That's why we should be careful about taking advice from those who don't believe in the Lord's power and promises in Scripture.

- **They left God out of the decision process.** Even though Joshua and Caleb encouraged them to believe that the Lord could bring them into the land, the people didn't even consider Him in their reasoning. We are often guilty of the same thing. Instead of seeking God's will in the matter, we rely on information, opinions, and our own reasoning. Like the Israelites, we have the promise of His presence, power, and provision to enable us to accomplish whatever He calls us to do if we will only trust and obey Him.
- **They allowed negative reports to overshadow God's promises.** After hearing about all the obstacles that awaited them in the Promised Land, they didn't remember all that God had done for them in the past. After being supernaturally rescued from Egypt and given divine provision in the wilderness, they had no legitimate reason for doubting that the Lord could bring them into the land. But they listened to men, not the Lord.
- **They forgot God's previous promises and work in their lives.** Instead of realizing that the Lord had brought them this far and would take them into the land, they wanted a new leader to take them back to Egypt. They refused to believe the Lord's promise and trust Him to overcome their enemies. Any time we leave God out of the equation, we're going to make foolish choices.

The Consequences

Everything the Israelites longed for was across the border, but because they wouldn't obey the Lord, His judgment came upon them. He declared that they would wander in the wilderness for forty years until all the men who were twenty years and older when they left Egypt had died. When they heard this, they

changed their minds and went out to take possession of Canaan, but because the Lord wasn't with them, they were defeated.

Sometimes God gives us opportunities that only come once. If our courage fails, we will never receive a second chance. This is why obedience is so important, even if we're afraid or reluctant. When we live in daily obedience to God, we'll never miss the opportunities He has for us, and He will supply whatever we need to accomplish what He's called us to do.

The Key to Obedience

Meditation on God's Word keeps us in line with His will. This includes reading the Scripture each day, talking to God, and bringing Him every issue that concerns us. The promises we need to strengthen our obedience are found in His Word. Scripture has the power to change our minds and attitudes from fear and uncertainty to confident courage. And it also reminds us that we are never alone if Jesus is our Savior. His Spirit lives within us, giving us guidance to know what to do and the power to accomplish it. When we trust the Lord and believe His promises, we have nothing to fear as we courageously move forward in obedience.

RESPONSE

- Have you ever lost your courage to obey the Lord? What happened as a result? Did you receive a second chance, or was the opportunity forever lost?
- When you face a challenge, what are your first thoughts and reactions? How has focusing on the Word of God strengthened you to obey despite the obstacles and difficulties?

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