

Giants In The Land

On Sunday, we continued our study of great stories in the early Old Testament by exploring the different ways Israel's spies reacted to what they saw in the Land of Promise.

1. Warm-up Question: To illustrate how people can process the same situation in very different ways, Jeff told about a gourmet taco restaurant in Seattle that offered free tacos for life to anyone who would tattoo the restaurant's name and logo on themselves. So many people responded, the restaurant had to cancel the promotion. If your favorite restaurant offered free lunch for life, would you get their tattoo?
2. After escaping slavery in Egypt, the Israelites traveled north across the wilderness toward Canaan – the Land of Promise. Within a few months they were encamped on the border of Canaan. Moses sent 12 spies to scout Canaan and report back. Read Numbers 13:1-2 and 17-33.
 - a. Suppose you had been one of the spies. When you saw the great fruitfulness of the land – incredible grapes, pomegranates and figs – how do you think you would have reacted?
 - b. When you saw all the giant Anakites [ANN-uh-kites] in the land, how do you think you would have reacted?
 - c. What the spies saw in the land was a classic good news/bad news scenario. All of them saw the same thing – the good and the bad – but they processed what they saw very differently. Caleb and Joshua said, “Let's go up at once and occupy [the land] for we are well able to overcome it.” (Num. 13:30.) Based on what we read in the passage, why do you think they were so confident? What were they thinking?
 - d. The other ten spies said, “The land we have gone through . . . devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. . . . And to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” (Num. 13:32-33.) Based on what we read in the passage, why do you think they were so pessimistic? What were they thinking?
 - e. Think about a really challenging situation you've faced in your life. As you look back on that situation, do you feel you responded like Joshua and Caleb or more like the other ten spies? What happened?
 - f. Read Numbers 14:1-4. The Israelites bought into the negative report of the 10 pessimistic spies. As a result, they spent the next 40 years wandering in the wilderness. If we make the same mistake in our life, how's it apt to affect us?
3. Jeff suggested that Numbers 13 illustrates the core choice we must all make in life. If we want to access the beautiful grapes that grow in the Land of Promise, we have to be prepared to face the giants. The grapes in the story represent possibilities. The

- giants represent obstacles. If we choose to focus on the possibilities, we surge forward into good things. If we choose to focus on the obstacles, we get stuck in the wilderness. Do you agree with the premise that how we choose to see life determines how we experience it? Why or why not?
4. Jeff invited us to apply the core principle of Numbers 13 to three key aspects of life, starting with whether we should believe in God or not.
 - a. What are some of the most common arguments made against God's existence? Which one of those arguments most troubles you?
 - b. What are some of the most common arguments made for God's existence? Which one of those arguments most resonates with you?
 - c. Philosopher Ravi Zacharias said, "To walk away from one's faith because of unanswered questions about evil is to walk into a storm of unanswered questions about good." What do you think he means? Do you agree or not?
 5. It's one thing to decide we believe in God in the abstract (as we've discussed above), and quite another to apply that belief in real time to everyday situations in life. That's where our faith becomes operational. To illustrate the point, Jeff shared the example of how one of our congregants responded to losing her job after almost 30 years at the same company. Despite shock and grief, she chose to believe God was present in the situation, moving her to a job where she could have better work/life balance. And that's what happened.
 - a. Think of something that's happened over the past week that was stressful or challenging. Did you choose to focus on the divine possibilities in that situation or become overwhelmed by the obstacles? Did you see the situation through the eyes of Caleb and Joshua or through the eyes of the other 10 spies?
 - b. In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton says, "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell [or] a Hell of Heaven?" What do you think he means? Do you agree or not?
 6. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances." Because that tends to cultivate the kind of Caleb/Joshua positivity that empowers our life. Name a difficult situation or challenge you are currently facing. What are some things you can be thankful for in that situation?

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday!

If you're in town next Sunday, remember, we really need you to be at church, since some will be on travel!