

Unbelief in the wilderness. (Quality: very good)

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Preacher: Mercer, Seth (1930-2017)

- [0 : 00] Feeling so much to need the Lord's merciful and gracious help, I venture this morning in directing your thoughts to the book of Numbers, chapter 14, and reading the eighth verse.
- The book of Numbers, chapter 14, and reading verse 8. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us, a land which floweth with milk and honey.
- The journeyings of the children of Israel from Egypt to the land of Canaan is so full of teaching, instruction, solemn warnings, and yet at the same time great encouragement.
- I also believe that in their journeyings, the Holy Spirit would direct our thoughts from earth to heaven.
- Oh, I would that we might be granted today a glimpse of the heavenly Canaan, and that we may together be brought to see perhaps more clearly, I hope it will be, than perhaps we've ever done the solemn difference between the sin of unbelief and the precious gift of faith.
- [2 : 11] Well, as I mentioned, I think on Wednesday evening, as we had to speak from another verse in this same book, but we are reading again through God's word at home, and it is in this way.
- And as we have been reading through this book, my own heart and my own soul has been very searched regarding the truths contained in it.
- Well, we have read how this great God said unto Moses, Send thou men that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel of every tribe of their fathers.
- And Moses, by the commandment of the Lord, sent them from the wilderness of Paran.
- All those men were heads of the children of Israel. Now, they were chosen men, chosen, I believe, by God, to search out the land of Canaan, which their God had promised to give them.
- [3 : 54] And of course, we have read of what happened. And how searching, to my own soul, this is.
- Because we know that there were twelve men, every one of them heads of the children of Israel, every one a head of their tribe.
- And, oh, that we may rightly consider this. Here were twelve men, appointed, chosen, yes, by God through his servant Moses, and they were sent to spy out the land of Canaan.
- They were instructed as to the way that they were to go in this. They were instructed as to how they were to view the land.
- If we think of what we have read this very morning, and see the land, what it is, and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many.
- [5 : 14] And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad. And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein or not.
- And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.

Well, they went, according to the will of God, to search out the land of Canaan.

And, oh, may the Holy Spirit impress this upon our hearts, this land their God would give them. He would give it to them.

A land flowing with milk and honey. Well, there were twelve men that were sent to spy out the land. And you will all know this.

[6 : 22] As we have read it together, what happened? Ten out of the twelve men, their poor hearts and minds were filled with unbelief.

They lost sight of all that their God had done for them. And, dear friends, how easy it is for us to forget what the Lord has done in our lives.

By nature, we are no better than those ten men. Do you understand that? I wonder how many of us are saying, yes, Lord, by nature, in my full and sinful self, I'm no different to those ten men.

What made the difference, then, in the hearts of Caleb and Joshua? Well, you see, they were given great faith, great hope, and great love.

And they were reminded of what the Lord had done for them. The others, it seemed, and, of course, when we're left to ourselves, I tell you again, we're no different.

[7 : 55] And I wonder how many may have come to chapel even this Lord's Day morning and whatever may be going on in your lives. And the Lord knows how you've come.

And it's a solemn thought. To my heart, it is a solemn thought. You know, we shall either be found this morning under the word of God, whether with unbelief raging in our hearts, or whether we are favoured, and may we be favoured, with the precious gift of faith in believing.

And I hope to be able to convey at least a little of this to you. But first of all, oh, those ten men, they brought back an evil report.

Dear friends, as we may be helped by the Holy Spirit in being our remembrance, how will this affect our hearts today in reflection upon our own lives?

Can we say this morning, thus far, my God has led me on and made his truth and mercy known?

[9 : 24] Yes, my hopes and fears, alternate rise and comforts mingle with my sighs. Oh, may we then be delivered from this terrible sin of unbelief I've mentioned, I believe in prayer, how it is recorded of the Lord Jesus Christ himself in his ministry, while upon the earth he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Oh, dear friends, we need to beware of this dreadful sin of unbelief, because it fights against God's love.

And in Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, there we have, and I want us just to notice this, that the apostle Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, he brings before them this very solemn account in the Old Testament.

And this is what he had to say to them. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, while it is said, while it is said, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation, this very provocation that we have before us this morning.

For some, when they had heard, did provoke, how be it not all that came out of Egypt by Moses, but with whom he was grieved forty years.

[11 : 20] Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, and to whom he swear, he, and to whom swear he, that they should not enter into rest?

But to them that believe not, so we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Well, how solemn if any of us should come to the hour and article of death not able to enter into that heavenly rest that we sang of in our second hymn this morning.

Oh, that rest, eternal rest, that, dear friends, may this surge every heart that's here, how solemn if we cannot enter into heaven because pass of this dreadful sin of unbelief.

We need it impressed upon our hearts. Again, I think of the Lord Jesus after his resurrection, and we can understand the feelings of his disciples in this, but there they were, the doors being shut because of their fear, and Jesus stood in the midst and said to them, peace be unto you, but I tell you this, that he upraided them for their unbelief and their hardness of heart.

[13 : 06] You see, there were ten men, they were heads of tribes, very important men in their day, and they had seen, they were witnesses to all that their God had done for them, and yet we read over and over again, they murmured, they complained, they rebelled, they sinned, and how many times if you carefully read through God's word, and not only through the book of numbers, but these earlier books of the Bible, but you'll read this how many times, dear Moses, as a type of the Lord Jesus, he stood between them and a holy God, he pleaded for them, and how the Lord was so merciful again and again to them.

I wonder how many of us here must acknowledge how merciful the Lord has been to us, throughout our lives. Well again you see the sad and solemn effect of this unbelief.

All they could see as we read of it later on, the cities walled up to heaven, the sons of the giants, and the giants themselves, and oh as they viewed this, and as they viewed all the differing nations that dwelt in the land of Canaan, and yet all they could see was all the things that were against them.

And if God be for us, if God be for us, who then can be against us? us. Now I hope we shall be favoured to really consider this.

And first of all, as we have read in chapter 14, and all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night.

[15 : 19] Let us not forget there were 600,000 footmen, as well as women and children. You think of that great congregation, and here they were, I think it's right, indeed it is right, and all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God we had died in this wilderness?

And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey, were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. Again, I have to say that by nature we are no better, and we are no different.

I wonder how many of us here must acknowledge that left to ourselves we murmur, we complain, and we do join with that hymn that we've just been singing, How hard's our lot?

[16 : 46] How hard's our lot? And yet, I hope to be able to bring before you what the Lord had done for them, and I hope we shall see in it even a little of what the Lord has done for us.

But where do we find dear Moses and Aaron, and you know dear friends, they were brought here ever so many times. Oh, how often this great congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron, Moses their leader, Aaron the high priest of God, and they murmured against them.

You see a likeness in these matters with our own hearts and lives? Shall guilty man complain, we've been singing? Shall sinful dust repine?

Let me just read it. You know, we have our hymns and we sing them, and I know I've said it before, but it's very easy to sing a hymn through and forget what we've sung when we come to the end of the hymn.

Now, isn't that true? You know, the grace of God will make us honest, but what did we sing just now? Shall guilty man complain?

[18 : 11] Shall sinful dust repine? And what is all our pain? How light compared with thine. Finish, dear Lord, what is begun?

Choose thou the way, but still lead on. I remember years ago now here, when there were those things that were going on among us, and it goes back many years now, and there were those things in which we were being tried and tested.

That that we believed in, hoped in, looked for, and it seemed as though our hopes were dashed. And oh, I remember those very lines, finish, dear Lord, finish, dear Lord, what has begun?

We knew there was that that the Lord had begun. And I believe it is so still today in hearts and souls that are here. I believe this.

I hope it's through God-given faith that I believe it, that in this chapel this morning there are those in whose hearts a good work has been begun.

[19 : 24] But how we need to cry with the hymn writer, finish, dear Lord, finish, dear Lord, what has begun. Choose thou the way, but still lead on.

Now as I go back many years to my thoughts regarding this, the Lord did finish that that was begun. After much testing and trying, and so we still desire it.

Finish, dear Lord, what has begun. The Lord knows what has been begun, even in young hearts and those that are older.

So what has had account this is, only the Lord can make it sad and solemn to us, as it's been made to my own soul as we've been reading these very things at heart.

Now on the other hand then, I've related regarding these ten men, and now we come has helped to this.

[20 : 36] There were two men, oh there were two men, and they brought back a good report. They honoured their God.

Friends, we need to be preserved from dishonouring our God in our lives. It's so easy to dishonour the Lord, but you see these two dear men, they couldn't dishonour their Lord.

They hadn't forgotten what the Lord had done for them, and so might it be with us here to die. And Joshua, the son of Naan, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes.

And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, here we have the language of faith. The land which we pass through to search it is an exceeding good land.

If the Lord delight in us, oh, how precious such truth as this is, if the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land.

[21 : 51] What is so upon my heart really is this, oh, that I could be helped to bring it before you today. if the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land.

Now, to me, most of all, it's this, the heavenly Canaan. We may have the witness in our very souls today, yes, I to the end shall endure, as sure as the earnest is given, more happy, but not more secure, the glorified spirit in heaven.

heaven, oh, that we could haste from all below. You may say, yes, but, pastor, minister, you do not know what is going on in my life.

You do not know all that I'm having to bear. You do not know all that I'm having to struggle with, the powers of darkness, satanic power, and Satan himself.

you do not know all that I'm having to live in. Well, of course I don't. But I can tell you this, if we're left to ourselves, we shall repine.

[23 : 07] We shall be like those, these very men, and this great congregation, they wept, and they had no need to weep. They had no need to weep, because their God was leading them, guiding them.

And oh, I have to say, before the end of the day, if the Lord will, you know, all those men that dishonoured God with their unbelief, they perished in the wilderness.

And oh, how many of that generation perished in the wilderness. And their wives and their children, they said here in verse 3, were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

Now, their very wives and their children, the very ones that they said should be a prey, they were the ones that were going to enter the promised land.

And yet, every day, the 40 days, we read, did we not? And they returned from searching of the land after 40 days. And for every day that they sinned with their unbelief, their God would have them sojourn in the wilderness, wander round and round for 40 years.

[24 : 33] 40 years they suffered. 40 years they suffered because of 40 days. Now, are these things solemn to us?

Are they searching? Do they search our hearts? I hope they will. I'm only a poor, weak, sinful man in myself.

But I do want to be God's servant to you. And I have to bring these solemn things before you. Let me remind you what the Apostle Paul had to say in writing to the Hebrews.

So we see. they could not enter in because of their unbelief. Again, I say it how solemn if we are not permitted to enter into heaven because of this dreadful sin.

It is a dreadful sin because it fights against God's love. love. Now, a further thought or two here.

[25 : 44] If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us, a land which floweth with milk and honey.

Now we have Caleb and Joshua here speaking out for their God. Only rebel not ye against the Lord.

Neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Here, dear friends, is the language of living faith. only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us.

Their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Fear them not. Oh, what grace these two men were given to stand up in front of over 600,000 men and women and children, what grace they were given to stand up and to own their sovereign guide, to own him, to own their God.

Only rebel not ye against the Lord. This may be a word for someone here this morning. You know by nature we are rebels we rebel against God.

[27 : 21] How soon we cry out sometimes how hard is our lot. All these things are against me. Why does this have to happen to me? Why has this had to happen to us?

Why do we have to live in such things as these? But how good when in the midst of it all we can say and the Lord is with us fear them not.

Friends we need to be warned against rebellion. Rebellion is a dreadful sin and the rebellious dwell in a dry land and they do indeed.

But what happened then? Notice in verse 10 in chapter 14 verse 15 verse 15 but all the congregation made stone them with stones.

We might say what a response this great congregation made to these two dear men. They wanted to get rid of them.

[28 : 30] They wanted them out of the way. But all the congregation made stone them with stones. But then what? Oh this great God is the same today.

We may be tried. We are tried. We are tested. And it seems at times we join with the prophet Jeremiah when he said I cry and shout he shutteth out my prayer.

There are things we can't understand. There are things that we need the Lord to do personally collectively and the Lord tarries and oh he alone knows why tarries but you know here what a contrast in this tenth verse that all the congregation made stone them with stones and the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

The glory of the Lord appeared. I know it's a great thing to think of but oh that the glory of the Lord might appear in this chapel this very morning that we might be under the sense of this the presence of almighty God and that his eye is upon every one of us.

Now I want to come as help to consider what the Lord had done for them. He had brought them out of the land of Egypt the house of bondage.

[30 : 11] He brought them out. And dear friends if the Lord has brought us out of the world in its bondage and the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear son oh how thankful we need to be that the Lord has done this for us.

Some of you will look back in your lives I hope you will and remember how you did live remember how your life was indeed found when you were galio like and you cared for none of these things and you wanted nothing to do with religion you may have rebelled against us so often it is there may be children boys and girls here this morning you may be rebelling against parental teaching and training and yet you know if you are you rebelling against God but these dear people dear they were because they were loved they were a peculiar people home is is it a home

I know I know I said it before but it seems to come into my thoughts I believe it was Mr. George Rose who used to say regarding the Lord's people when they come to the end and when they die and he would say about them they have either gone home to heaven or they left their home and if it's like that with us we shall not want to leave this world which way is it with us this morning which way is it with us this Lord's day morning is this world our home or have we had to prove that it is no longer our home and are we found among those that are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness you know the Lord's promise to such is this but seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you oh this is the path this is the way so the

Lord had brought them out of all that they had suffered in Egypt their task masters and you know in our lives we in our fallen state we have task masters you might say what do you mean well we have those things that our hearts go after we have things that we want to do and you know the devil he drives poor sinners on in this he drives them on oh but to be delivered from this poor dying world and to have our feet set in the narrow way that leads to life eternal oh I just remind you in closing of the words of Jesus broad is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many there be that go in their act but straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life eternal and few there be that find it oh have we found it through the grace of

God have we come through the gateway of regeneration into this narrow way that leads to life eternal you know it's been rightly said of the narrow way there is only room for our souls and God I have to leave it with you but dear friends may you be helped to consider this the dreadful sin of unbelief and what it did for so many people and the sacred difference between and I am aware that it must be given but if we have been given that sweet spirit of faith in believing I just think of the dear woman who came to Jesus with her daughter who was vexed with the devil you know how Jesus dealt with her you know how he dealt with her but what do we read about her I just read it and leave this with you she came to

[35 : 06] Jesus and when she came to him we find her saying this and behold a woman of Canaan came out of the same coast and cried unto him here's the language of these souls that are on the way to Zion to the heavenly Canaan have mercy on me oh Lord we shall have to begin just like that with our own hearts I have to do so have mercy on me oh Lord thou son of David my daughter is grievously vexed with her but what the thought that came to me was this then Jesus answered and said unto her oh woman great is thy faith be done to thee as thou wilt and her daughter was made whole from that very hour Amen go

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