

Pastor Brian Bell

Most of us know the value of not wasting things – in our economy today, most people are doing their best to not be wasteful – well, technically I should clarify that most older adults understand the value of not wasting things – I do believe that the younger generations are being force-fed from the media that if something is over a year old, it’s worn out its usefulness – I’m not promoting hoarding, but I think we need to learn the benefit of not being wasteful – my granddad tried to model that for our family – he wasn’t a hoarder, but he did save things that most of us would probably toss in the trash immediately – we also need to understand the value of not wasting things we can’t get back, such as time – we’ve all heard the phrase, “no one’s ever looked back on their life thinking ‘I wish I’d spent more time at the office’” – well, there is a greater danger that the world should be wary of and that’s the danger of wasting your life – in his book, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, John Piper writes, “God created us to live with a single passion: to joyfully display his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life. The wasted life is the life without this passion. God calls us to pray and think and dream and plan and work not to be made much of, but to make much of him in every part of our lives.” (**don’t waste your life**) – in this passage in Numbers we are going to see an example of how to waste the life God has given us – this is a challenge for believers and unbelievers alike – yes, there are devastatingly greater consequences for those whose lives come to an end having never had a relationship with Jesus – but as believers we can find ourselves floating through life listlessly, without the passion we just heard about from John Piper, a passion for magnifying the name of God – whichever camp you may fall into this morning, I hope you will see from this passage the danger of wasting your life – we’re actually going to see a great example of how to waste 40 years and thousands of lives

this passage we are going to look at is a very familiar passage to many – this is the story of Joshua and Caleb and the other 10 Israelite spies that were sent into Canaan to check out the land and the people there – they come back and give their report and the people of Israel make their decision of whether or not to move into Canaan based on this report – the decision that was made was a crucial one for God’s chosen people – God’s people at times are faced with decisions of pivotal and epochal significance, decisions that will effect generations to come – here was one of those decisions and the people of God failed – they were given the choice, they counted the cost and decided it wasn’t worth the risk – during World War II, when the United States military was planning the invasion of the inland of Japan, the Defense Department ordered them to prepare 250,000 body bags for the first wave of the invasion, expecting 85-90% casualties in the first two or three waves – they counted the cost and saw that the risk was worth reward, our country and our freedom was worth fighting, and dying for – we may never be faced with a decision that will affect thousands of people at a time, but some decisions we make will impact our families for generations to come

read Numbers 13:1-16 – these spies were sent in to do reconnaissance – those who have been in the military know there is a saying that there is no such thing as wasted reconnaissance – yes, there may be times when we have to do things on faith – God asks his people to do things all the time on faith – but when afforded the opportunity, we should take advantage of what God has given us when he allows us to observe the details surrounding a decision – Moses sent the spies into Canaan with specific instructions – it was good for them to know what the land was like and what they would be up against – the fact that God was giving this opportunity should have clued them in that the taking of the promised land was not going to be an easy task – if they were going to simply occupy some uninhabited piece of property, God could have just let them walk into it – but God never promised the children of Israel that taking the land was going to cost them nothing – He just promised them the land

Pastor Brian Bell

– He told them, “That’s your land, I’ve given it to you, we’re getting ready to take it” – as they viewed the land and it’s inhabitants, they were to bring back a report to Moses and the people of Israel – this mission report that these men where to bring back was not to be an assessment based solely on empirical data – everything they viewed was to be seen through the lens of God’s sovereignty – their assessment of the situation was to accompany four things – what happened was ten of these spies forgot these four things, thus wasting their lives and the lives of thousands of other Israelites – these four things that can be seen in this passage are: God’s promise, God’s faithfulness, God’s generosity and God’s power – Moses told these men not to forget these things, and in this passage Moses tries to show us that we should not forget these things as well

- I. **God’s promises – vv. 1-16** – in these verses, Moses reminds us of God’s promises and in every circumstance of our life, as believers we, too, are to remember God’s promise and God’s faithfulness and God’s power – look at the word the Lord speaks to Moses in the appointing of the spies – what does God say in verse 2? – “Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan which I am going to give to the sons of Israel” – is there a question mark at that the end of that sentence – does God say, “the land which I might give to the sons of Israel ...which I am thinking about giving to the sons of Israel...which there is a potential possibility that the sons of Israel might want it” – NO, he says the land “which I am going to give to the sons of Israel” – He is telling Moses, the land belongs to you because I am going to give it to you – these spies that are sent into the land, no matter what they see, should have these words ringing in their ears, “this is the land I am going to give to you” – everything that they see is to be seen through the grid of God’s promise – and they are to act on God’s promise – we are called to do the same thing, act on God’s promise – not to act on God’s promise is not to believe God’s word – it is unbelief – and we can read this and condemn the Israelite people for what they did here, but we do this ourselves – we know God’s promises, yet many times we see the obstacles and circumstances and challenges and situations of our lives as if they are bigger than God and His promises – and if we approach these obstacles and circumstances and challenges and situations as if they are bigger than God, we are doing the same thing the children of Israel did – and that’s what happened here – the spies, having been appointed by the word of the Lord to Moses to go into a land which God has already promised them, forgot that – it doesn’t show up in their assessment of the land, except from Caleb and Joshua – the report from these 10 spies was utterly devastating – it was sincere, but it was devastating – the gave a detailed account of everything they had seen but they forgot to factor in one thing: God – if you’re going to forget to factor in something, make sure it isn’t God that you forget (**don’t forget God**) – that should have been at the forefront of their minds – “As we give this report, we must remind everyone that God has promised us this land” – but they forgot that part – now one thing we should take away from this that we can overcome any situation in our lives because we have God on our side and we know what he has promised us – and to know God’s promises we must be familiar with his word – God doesn’t speak to us today the way he did for those in the Old Testament – the writer of Hebrews tells us that in **Hebrews 1:1-2**, “*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son*” – this was written so that we would understand that God speaks through his word, his word also being his Son – we don’t have Jesus physically here with us anymore but he still left his word for us hear his voice – take caution when you hear someone say, “God spoke to me” – if that means they felt a prompting based on Scripture, that’s one thing – but to claim that God is speaking audibly is very dangerous given what the writer of Hebrews tells us – I

Pastor Brian Bell

like what John MacArthur was quoted as saying, “If you want to hear the audible voice of God, read your Bible out loud” – God speaks to us now through his word and in the Scriptures we find God’s promises to us – we can read **Jeremiah 29:11** and discover that God knows the plans he has for us – we can read **Isaiah 40:29** and know that God gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless – we can find peace in reading **Romans 10:9** where God promises that whoever confesses Jesus Christ as Lord will be saved – we must be careful of what we claim to be a promise of God if we cannot find it in scripture – too many times people make foolish decisions, claiming that God’s in control, yet God never promised them the outcome – but when God does give us a promise, we can take it to the bank, so the lesson to be learned here is to never forsake the promises of God, which the children of Israel did

- II. God’s faithfulness – vv. 17-22** – next Moses draws our attention to God’s faithfulness and the point is simple: in every circumstance of our life we are to acknowledge God’s faithfulness – it’s not just that God promises stuff to us, it’s that He has already been active in fulfilling those promises, and if we will just take the time to assess it acknowledge it, we will realize that He has been faithful to us – as you look at verses 17-22, you may wonder what that has to do with God’s faithfulness – well, we must look at where the children of Israel have gone – they have gone from the Negev up to the hill country to Hebron – Hebron was the highest part of the land, you can see all around it, it was a strategic point – but more importantly was what was at Hebron – **Genesis 23:19-20** – the Israelites were at the graves of Abraham and Sarah, to whom four hundred years ago God had given a promise – God told Abraham, “I am going to make you the father of nations, I am going to make your descendants like the sand on the seashore, like the stars in the sky, and I’m going to give you this land” – half of that promise had already been fulfilled – the very fact that those twelve leaders were representatives of twelve massive tribes of over 600,000 fighting men, when they got to Hebron should they not have fallen down with a sense of the awesomeness of how God has already been faithful to His promise – a family of seventy had gone down into Egypt, and four hundred years later two million of them are coming out and getting ready to possess the land – God has already been faithful to His promises! – He’s been faithful, but they forgot that – they forgot God’s faithfulness because what was before them was hard – I know I could go on about how many times God has been faithful to me, faithful beyond what I deserve – I know that God has never left or forsaken me – even more I could testify that God has been faithful when times have been hard – there have been situations that, given the chance, I would not have signed up for but God is always faithful – I’m sure if we had time, we could go around the room and people could testify to God’s faithfulness and as we look closer at God’s faithfulness we can see how often God spares his people not by not causing them to avoid rough waters, but by being by their side as they do – but the children of Israel, instead of looking at their situation and saying, “You know, this is not going to be easy, but God is faithful and listening to His word is the right thing to do,” they looked at the problem, they looked at the obstacle and they forgot God’s faithfulness – Moses is saying, act on God’s promises, acknowledge God’s faithfulness
- III. God’s generosity – vv. 23-27** – if it seems ridiculous that the people of Israel would have forgotten God’s promises and his faithfulness given where they are, then what we read in the next verses takes it to the next level – in these verses we read the report of the spies – and in their report they have brought back physical evidence of what awaited them – they had a cluster of grapes that was so large that two men had to carry them together with a pole – can you grasp the absurdity of

Pastor Brian Bell

these people doubting what God has done and will do for them as they have this huge cluster of grapes right in front of them – God had told the children he was going to give them a land flowing with milk and honey and, *surprise*, they report that it *is* a land flowing with milk and honey – we shouldn’t be surprised that God does what He says He will do – we can, and should, be amazed that God blesses us through His promises and at the generosity with which He answers them, but we shouldn’t be surprised – when we pray for someone and God answers that prayer, it shouldn’t surprise us – we should pray with the very understanding and knowledge that God can answer that prayer – it shouldn’t stop us from rejoicing in amazement at the wonder and majesty of our glorious God, but we should never forget that our God is faithful and He is generous – what does it mean to say that the land flowed with milk and honey – some would argue that this is a figurative statement and some would say that it is literal – I think that the point to be made here is that what God said would be there, was there – he promised to provide for them and made sure that they would be nourished in the land they were to inhabit – so where did that milk and honey come from? – it came from God! – He put it there – we should stop right here and sing *The Doxology* – “Praise God from whom all blessings flow!” – when Moses shows us the blessings of God’s generosity in that rich land He was about to give the people of Israel, he expects us to get down on our knees and ascribe to God all the blessings, to praise Him from whom all blessings flow – but that doesn’t happen here in the report from the spies – it’s acknowledged more like a scientific report – they brought back some of the giant fruit, said “it actually is a land flowing with milk and honey,” as if there was some doubt – they didn’t give God praise for His generosity and unbelief crept in

- IV. **God’s power – vv. 28-33** — I preached a sermon a while ago titled “But God” and I looked at the significance of that small three-letter word – in Ephesians 2:4 that word “but” carried enormous weight as we saw the contrast of our sinfulness and God’s mercy – in this passage this word carries enormous weight but in a negative sense – in the final verses of this chapter, Moses points to God’s power – immediately after telling the people how rich the land was, they follow that up with a “nevertheless” – this is just a fancy “but” – these spies saw, and reported, God’s generosity, then followed that with “but” – they saw the giant people living there and they got scared – There’s an interesting football story. It seems Knute Rockne was about to face the football team of USC, and he knew that USC had a far superior team and wondered if there was any way he could defeat them. Then he hit on this idea. So, he scoured the city of South Bend, IN, for about a hundred of the biggest men he could find. When he had about a hundred men, each at least 6’5” or more and weighing in at 300 pounds or more, he put them all in Notre Dame uniforms. With the shoulder pads and the helmets, they looked bigger. Then, when it was time for the game to begin, he sent these men out of the locker room first. As the USC team watched, they just kept coming, and coming, and coming until these hundred men were all the USC team saw. The USC coach kept telling his team, “they can only field eleven men at a time.” But the damage was done. None of these men ever played one minute of the game. But USC had become so intimidated at the sight of them that they were unable to function, and Notre Dame won the game – there is no doubt that there were giants living in the land – it was this race of men that the Philistine giant, Goliath, came from – I don’t doubt that this would have been a scary sight to behold – I don’t believe that God’s purpose in sending the spies into the land was for them to come back with the report, “Piece of cake! We can do this!” – the proper response should have been, “This is too big for us...God will do it, He’s sovereign. He’s going to display His power, because this is way too big for us. We know that

His promise and His power will prevail not because of us, but because of Him. This is an opportunity for a display of His glory. This is not going to be about our everlasting renown. This is not so that the people of God will remember the Israeli Army, Navy and Air Force. This thing is going to be about the display of God’s sovereignty, because this thing is too big for us.” – if we’re not careful, when we enjoy little successes in challenges, we can be tempted to think, “I can do this” – the message of the Bible to believers is not, “you can do this” but “you can do all things through Him who strengthens you” or what is impossible with men is accomplished by God – the message of the Bible is Christ and the gospel accomplishes what you can never accomplish – the message is God is sovereign and you are not **(God is sovereign and you are not)** – the message is God will have the last word and glory, not man – of course the problem is that we live in a world where, even in the church, man the creature is big and God the Creator and Redeemer is small – that was the problem with the majority of the spies – they magnified the problems and minimized the power of God – what they should have done was not minimized the problems, but embrace the impossibility of those problems in terms of their own power, and at the same time, acknowledge and magnify the power of God to overcome all – they didn’t and we see the harm that they did in their sin – there is a message for us in that: unbelief always has its consequences

there are many applications to be found in this passage and in the next chapter – we can see how greatly our sin affects those around us as the unbelief of the spies spread to the people of Israel – if you want to keep reading in Numbers, chapter 14 begins with the people grumbling because of the report they had just heard – how quickly they had forgotten how God had rescued them, or that they now viewed God’s provision in their life as a curse, claiming that God only rescued them so that they could die at the hands of these giant men – this was the same argument the people of Israel made when they came to the Red Sea – and God again showed them his power! – how many times can a person be shown the promises of God fulfilled, his glory and power and still not trust him? – we can also learn that even though God forgives and pardons sin, if we look at **14:20**, there are still consequences and God’s glory must prevail – and we can see that our example should be that of Joshua and Caleb – chapter 14 tells us that every person in the Israel camp that was 20 years or older would die in the wilderness with the exception of Joshua and Caleb – they were the only two of that generation who were allowed to set foot in the promised land – if we want to live a life pleasing to God, one that is not wasted, we must not make the same decision these 10 spies did, forgetting God’s promises, faithfulness, generosity and power – do our lives operate around these truths? – if not, let’s repent and start now – we must thank God for this word of warning, and also this word of hope – in our failure, where we fall short, there is a gospel hope – a hope that is not about something in us, not about something we can do, not a hope about accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative – it’s a hope about what God has done in Christ for us and our salvation – let the failure of Israel drive us to the Savior of Israel and of the world