

6. Your way, your consequence

December 29, 2011

I am sure that many of you remember a legendary singer Frank Sinatra and one of his songs "My Way". A portion of the lyrics says, "And more, much more than this, I did it my way." OK, it sounds tough and macho to do everything "my way." But at what cost?

In other words, that person in the song was selfish. This might be acceptable to the unbelieving world, but not as followers of Jesus Christ. We are not here to do everything according to our ways, but His way. If we can have our ways, we would destroy ourselves in no time by choosing broad and easy ways all the time. What does Jesus say about that?

Matthew 7:13 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

At Kadesh-Barnea, on the border of the Promised Land, the Israelites foolishly forfeited their opportunity to enter the Promised Land and claim their inheritance. I strongly believe that what we can learn from chapter 13 and 14 would apply to all of us – reminding us today that it is a dangerous thing to trifle with the will of God. Because we may end up spending the rest of our lives wandering around, just waiting to die.

I know that some Christians think that the idea of the "Promised Land" is a picture of heaven. That is far from the truth. Because there won't be any battles in heaven. Rather, Canaan is a picture of the inheritance God has planned for each of His children today – the work He wants us to do and the places He wants us to occupy. Yes, the Lord our God has a perfect plan for each of us, but we can have these blessings only by faith in Him and obedience to His commandments.

A. A PLAIN DUMB RECONNAISSANCE ASSIGNMENT

Numbers 13:1-3 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them." 3 So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel.

To truly understand what is going on here, we must go to Deuteronomy 1:

Deuteronomy 1:22-23 And everyone of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.' 23 The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe.

The Israelites wanted to know what was ahead of them. They talked Moses into this idea. Had they ever heard anything about the Promised Land from anyone? Yes, many times from the Lord who had provided food and water to them in the wilderness daily and protected them from the Egyptian army's attack. Yet, they wanted to hear from their own people. Their request contained doubt more than wonder and excitement.

The Lord had promised this land to their patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and now reaffirmed that promise through Moses.

God was letting them have their own way, not because their way was better than His, but because He wanted to teach them a lesson. They needed to learn to trust the Word of God and do the will of God in His way, not their own way.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Remember what I taught you guys previously – the worst God can do for us is allowing us to have our way to face our own consequences.

B. JUST FACTS, NOT YOUR EDITORIAL

Numbers 13:26-33 Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan." 30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." 32 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. 33 There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

The twelve spies traveled about 500 miles during their forty days of their reconnaissance mission of the Promised Land, but they did not discover anything that God already didn't tell them. They knew the names of the pagan nations, how rich the lands were before they went in.

This recon mission might have been a great idea from a conventional military point of view, but it was a waste of time from a spiritual point of view. God already had given them the land and commanded them to go in and take it. All they had to do was "Trust and Obey." Out of the twelve spies, only two of them saw the land from God's point of view, the rest didn't.

That was where they failed. That is where many Christians fail. Just like these ten spies, we often add our own editorial opinion. What would it matter to them if all these pagan nations had Tomahawk missiles, Abraham Armored Tanks, and F-35 Stealth Fighter Jets against the Israelites' clubs and home-made spears?

Romans 8:31b If God is for us, who can be against us?

It doesn't matter whether America that is led by Obama administration is for Israel or not, Israel is and will be protected from any enemy's threats by the power and promise of God. America is the one which should be concerned for deserting Israel.

There are four things we come up with in our hearts that hinder our faith in the Lord:

1) Doubt

It is a serious and disrespectful challenge to our God's faithfulness for us. When we doubt the Lord, we are doubting His promise to us as well as His character. In my opinion, it is the ultimate insult to Him.

2) Forgetfulness

It has nothing to do with living in or nearby Green Valley. It is an intentional forgetfulness to our God's faithfulness and what He had done for us previously. Our forgetfulness works hand in hand with doubt to remove any memory of His' faithfulness from our hearts.

3) Assumption

For some crazy and dumb reasons, we tend to think that we know better than the Lord and we assume that He should do things according to what we want and when we want.

Numbers 14:1-4 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."

The unbelief of the ten spies truly represented the unbelieving heart of the nation. Israel wept that night upon hearing that the enemies in the Promised Land were so formidable that they assumed even their God could not conquer them and their life without God and going back to the slavery in Egypt would be much easier.

We often expect that of God, and resent adversity in our lives, forgetting the example of Jesus who had it much worse than any of us could possibly imagine.

When the child of God is in the will of God, there is no place for complaining, even if the circumstances are difficult. The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God can't provide for us or the power of God can't protect us. If our daily prayer is, "Your will be done," and if we walk in obedience to God's will, then what is there to complain about?

A complaining spirit is evidence of an ungrateful heart and an unsundered will. By our grumbling, we're daring to say that we know more than God does about what's best for His people.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing

Numbers 14:9 Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them."

Contrary to their assumed fear, what Joshua and Caleb told the Israelites reminds me these verses:

Ephesians 6:11-12 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The believers of Jesus Christ do not fight for victory, rather we fight from the victory which the Lord Jesus already had done on the cross.

C. ANOTHER INTERCESSION OF MOSES

Numbers 14:11-13 Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? 12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." 13 And Moses said to the Lord: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, Numbers 14:15-16 Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, 16 'Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.'

As Moses had done when the Israelites worshiped the golden calf, Moses interceded for the people and turned away the wrath of God. For a second time, God offered to make a new nation out of Moses and completely destroy the Jewish people, but Moses refused.

Moses, first of all, reasoned with the Lord and reminded Him that if the Lord wiped out the Israelites, it would tarnish His glory. Secondly, he reminded the Lord for His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give them the land and He could not go back on His word.

Moses' intercession brings a very important point for us to ponder: Did Moses change the mind of God with his prayer? Somehow we can think that Moses calmed down God's anger against the Israelites. No, that is not the case. Who did inspire Moses to pray? The Lord, as He does all prayers that were done according to His will.

God's response here shows a great deal about His holiness and grace. His holiness to judge the people's sins, but His grace to save the next generation and to bring them into the Promised Land just as He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Listen, our prayers don't change the heart of God, rather since He knew what we are going to pray to Him before the creation of the universe, He chooses to use our prayers as the channel by which to pour out His grace and blessings to those who need and at the same time He builds our faith in Him stronger than ever before.

D. DEATH SENTENCE ON THE REBELS

Numbers 14:28-29 Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: 29 The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Numbers 14:31 But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. Numbers 14:34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. Numbers 14:36-37 Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land, 37 those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the Lord.

God's judgment was threefold:

- The nation would wander for 38 years, thus making forty years in the wilderness, one for each day the spies had explored the land.
- During that time, the older generation, twenty years and upward, would die and not enter the land, except for Caleb and Joshua.
- The ten unbelieving spies died because of the evil report they delivered.

The Jews had lamented that they wanted to die in the wilderness in v2. Out of their own mouths, God passed judgment. We need to be careful what we say to God when we complain, because He may take us up on it.

Moses led the world's longest funeral march, and Caleb and Joshua watched their generation die. But Caleb and Joshua would be encouraged by God's promise that both of them would enter the land and enjoy their inheritance just as the blessed hope of Christ's return encourages God's people today in spite of the trials we experience on our Christian walk.

4) Presumption

Numbers 14:39-45 Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. 40 And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned!" 41 And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of the Lord? For this will not succeed. 42 Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the Lord is not among you. 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you." 44 But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop; nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed from the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.

These Israelites thought that they could make it all better with a few religious works and words but their hearts were not changed. They made a futile attempt in the flesh to accomplish what they had rejected by faith, and it ended in defeat.

When our eyes are on ourselves and our circumstances, we lose godly perspective that comes from the Lord and say and do ridiculous things that we are going to regret later.

Admitting sin isn't the same as confessing sin and turning to the Lord to seek His mercy.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) A faith that has not been tested can not be trusted. And our God tests our faith to help us make sure it is genuine and to help make it grow in us.

2) We need to be careful what we say to God when we complain, because He may take us up on it.