

Read Numbers 13-14:4 and Luke 8:14-12, 49-56

About 14 months had passed since the people of Israel had left Egypt. They had moved beyond Mt. Sinai to an area called Paran when the Lord said to Moses . . . READ NUMBERS 13:1-3, 17-21, 23, 25-14:4

This is a story of a dramatic contrast in thinking. Did you hear it? Standing there holding up one end of the pole on which the huge cluster of grapes hung, one of the leaders said:

*“It is indeed a bountiful country; but, the people are powerful and the towns are large and fortified.”*

Caleb responded enthusiastically – *“Let’s go at once to take the land!”*

Another leader, standing near the pole overflowing with the bounty of the land said – *“We even saw giants there!”*

But Caleb confidently countered – *“We can certainly conquer it!”*

The first guys set down their prize and whined – *“We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are . . . The land will devour anyone who goes to live there . . . We are like grasshoppers!”*

Who saw reality? Here we have two dramatically different ways of assessing reality. Have you ever been part of such a conversation when there are two different views? Now if you had been there, which side would you take?

In this case, fear won. Fear colored reality. Fear prevented them from seeing the bounty in their hands. In fact, even though they saw that the land was great, the more they talked, the more convinced they became that they would not succeed.

How would that kind of outlook affect the Armed Forces if they were facing a war? How would such an attitude affect the Texas Rangers this season? What if The Netherlands soccer team operated from such a viewpoint in the World Cup competition? How many Olympian winners display that kind of opinion before the games?

The naysayer’s perspective resulted in unilateral despondency until collectively the people decided it was best to retreat to Egypt. They assumed defeat.

How about you? Do you presume defeat before you take on something, like a new job, or a new school, or even plans for retirement? Or, do you embrace the challenge before you as God’s gracious gift given especially for you?

This story is about two dramatic contrasts in thinking.

Possessing the land was Israel's next chapter. This was not a problem that God was bailing them out of but a blessing given simply because they belonged to God. It was not meant to kill them! From God's perspective this was a bright new day.

The land was the promise they had been raised to believe in and look forward to!

Let's think about our faith for a moment. How many of you have been in church all your life? I have been in church since the age of four. My mother decided I needed religious training so she took me to church, had me baptized, and enrolled me in Sunday School. It was a GIFT given to me.

Do you see church as a gift? Someone brought you, or witnessed to you in such a way that you came. Being here is the most valuable thing you can have on earth; IF you live into its promises.

Israel would have land that enjoyed rain and abundant produce, a land of plenty, as opposed to living enslaved in oppressive Egypt or the desolate desert (Deut 8). It was God's gift.

God promised to go before them and subdue the people so they might dispossess them (Deut 9:3). They could have it if they would embrace it and believe.

But Israel didn't live into the promise; instead they were overcome by fear. Assuming defeat, they rebelled against the Lord's order to "go up and occupy the land." God's Word says their actions showed they neither trusted God nor obeyed Him (Deut 9:23-24).

Do you assume defeat? Or embrace God's promises, no matter how hard reality may seem? In God's hands, reality has a much brighter future than seeing reality colored by fear.

Now I am certain that you would never assume defeat in matters of faith! But this message makes me a little nervous. Have I always embraced God's gifts? I'm not so sure. Just in case, perhaps it would be good to explore this idea further.

The story of Jairus in the gospel of Luke gives us some keys. Jairus had a dire need – his only daughter was deathly ill – and so he went to Jesus. But after he sought Jesus, his case became worse, even hopeless when his daughter died. Sometimes God allows us to experience the worst, even when we come to Him in faith. We don't know why. But we do know this lesson does not teach that we will escape from some of the terrible realities of this world.

But Jesus told Jairus, "Do not fear. Only believe and she will be saved."

Well, everybody knew she was dead. That was ridiculous, and so they laughed at Jesus. How naïve He is. Don't you see it, Jesus? She's dead!

But Jesus wanted them to see the reality beyond the circumstances. Is this story a promise that every child who dies will be raised? No. But, it is an admonition to look to Jesus' power, which is able to work in your situation, no matter how impossible it may seem. It encourages us to not

assume defeat, but to assume blessing and victory when you put your life wholly in the Lord's hands.

One woman who put her life wholly in Jesus' hands was Audrey Wetherell Johnson. A British missionary to China, she was arrested and imprisoned before finally being forced to leave. Times were tough, but even in those impossible circumstances she speaks of God's daily provisions and loving kindness.

Months of malnourishment left her with ill health, so she moved to southern California, hoping to one day return to China. But things didn't work out. She was so disappointed by this seeming sideline. One day five ladies came to her and asked her to teach them the Bible, not exactly her vision of victory. But God spoke to her and said, "Don't be afraid of small beginnings." So she said yes. After awhile, the study outgrew the house. They moved to a larger house and eventually to a church. After awhile, someone from another church said, "Can we teach your Bible lessons?" Today, fifty years later, BSF International has over 1,000 classes, with 200,000 class members in 38 nations, across six continents.

God knows what He's doing.

Do you want to journey into greater faith at FPCD? I do! I believe we are gaining faith daily, and I anticipate living fully into God's blessing.

When it came right down to it, the Israelites were believers who had little faith. They lived in weakness, not power. In the face of God's blessing, when it was required that they do something to attain it, they assumed defeat.

They saw the circumstances before them more than they saw God.

But God does not ever lead us into permanent defeat. If you have a circumstance that seems like defeat, you just put it in God's hands every day and ask what you need to learn. Ask God to help you gain courage. Cling to God and look forward not back. Soon you will find you are strong, brave, and mature, not weak, fearful, and lacking in faith. Soon you will begin to anticipate victory like Caleb,

*"Let us go at once for we are well able to overcome it!"*

We might consider Caleb's faith as radical. But he was looking forward, not back. He had his eye on the prize, as did Joshua. Caleb looked back only with God's deliverance fresh on his mind.

What is your view of your circumstances? God is big enough and powerful enough to overcome all obstacles. God sees and plans bright futures. Will you risk it? Or will you assume defeat? Be careful what you decide.

Israel preferred to live here (picture of wilderness). So God gave them what they wanted. They lived out the rest of their days in the desert.

But the two who had their eye on the prize, God gave them the blessing. Caleb and Joshua were the only two, besides the children, who went in and received the land.

Are your eyes on the prize? What would you rather receive? As Joshua once said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

AMEN