

Grasshoppers or Giant-Killers? Numbers 13:26-33

According to Dr. Harold Levinson, approximately 30 million Americans live in fear. In another survey 3000 people disclosed their worst fears:

- * 41% responded that public speaking was their worst fear,
- * 32% said they were afraid of heights
- * 22% feared financial problems
- * 19% were afraid of death,
- * 18% were afraid to fly,
- * 14 % feared being alone or abandoned

A couple of years ago I saw a cartoon that described a fear that is unique to ministers. The “medical” terminology for this fear is “transcontinental congrophobia” – “the feeling, even when you’re 1800 miles away from home, that one of your church members is eavesdropping in the next booth.”

What are you most afraid of in life?

Maybe you’re afraid of rejection?

Many people are afraid of failure. Men especially are often afraid of low or no achievement?

I was astonished to come across one of Beth Moore’s recent books, *So Long Insecurity: You’ve Been a Bad Friend.* In it she exposes more personal biographical detail than any previous book she has written and confessed how she had lived with insecurity since she was a little girl. Here is a woman identified, not only as the most popular woman’s Bible teacher in the nation, but the most popular Bible teacher period. She’s a very attractive woman by almost any standard, has a good family, and plenty of success. Yet underneath it all, she confesses she’s like a little girl afraid of rejection by people who love her and those who only think they do.

Whatever your fear it can paralyze you and keep you from experiencing all that God wants for you. It can rob of you peace. It can keep you trapped in the dry deserts where life is safe but not really, comfortable but only momentarily. It can keep you from entering the Promised Land that God has in store for you. There is a land flowing with milk and honey out there for you, but fear can prevent you from entering it.

Context

Our text for today describes the Israelites at the southern edge of the Promised Land. Just a brief reminder of how they got there. It began with Abraham when God promised him he would give him the land from Dan to Beersheba, a land we generally associate with Palestine. In those days it was called Canaan. But Abraham’s descendents became slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Finally, God acted. He heard their cries, raised up a deliverer and helped them escape Egyptian bondage. Moses led the

Israelites out of Egypt and then across the Red Sea which swallowed up the pursuing Egyptian army. Finding their way to Mount Sinai, the people were given the 10 Commandments so they could order their lives in the new land. Despite their murmurings and grumbings God provided meat and bread for the Israelites every day. Numbers 12 picks up the story where the Israelites have migrated north to the Desert of Paran, what today would be called the Sinai Peninsula. It is that piece of geography connecting Africa to Asia. They are on the southern edge of the land God had promised to them. They have witnessed the mighty hand of God defeat the most powerful army on the face of the earth and they have received his provision, without fail, since the great escape.

According to Numbers 13, Moses commands the 12 tribes of Israel to select one leader who will go as a spy into the land. The only 2 names we remember are Joshua and Caleb. We'll learn why that is true as the story unfolds. These 12 men go in the land to see what kinds of fields and fruits it produces, what the people are like, the fortifications of their cities, and anything else that might help the Israelites enter and secure dominance of the land. The text we read today picks up at this point, where the men are returning after 40 days of reconnaissance to bring their report on the land to Moses, his brother Aaron, and the whole Israelite community.

The Report

The initial report given by the reconnaissance team was of one voice. All 12 were in agreement it was a land flowing with milk and honey, a phrase that has been used ever since to describe a place filled with abundance and opportunity. It's the phrase most often used when the Europeans were describing America, or the early American colonies were describing Kentucky and the westward expanse of the nation. Canaan was bountiful, full of grapes, figs, and pomegranates. The 12 brought back evidence, a cluster of grapes that was so large, it took 2 men to carry it on a large pole. The 12 continued in agreement about the size of the people and the strength of the cities. They discovered the Anakim, giant people they have never seen in Egypt. Later, in their history a little shepherd boy would encounter one of the descendants of the Anakim on the battlefield. His name was Goliath. The cities were fortified, surrounded by walls of stone and guarded by armies. The various clans were named and documented. The Amalekites in the South, the Canaanites in the West, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites residing in the center of the promised land.

You could see the countenance of the people fall as they heard the report. Giants. Large fortified cities. Armies of warriors. Their hearts sank. They were intimidated. They began to grumble. "This isn't what we expected."

"No one told us we would have to fight giants."

"We will surely die. What good is freedom if your blood is spilled in the desert."

“I wanted a little plot of land, low taxes, and small government. Now they’re preparing to ask me for a sacrifice, support for this ego trip for Moses, and his friends that are mesmerized by his leadership.”

Caleb’s Response

One of the 12 spies heard the murmuring and knew he had to say something. Caleb knew the moment was critical in the history of his people. And he stood up and the Scriptures say he silenced the people and said, “***We should go up and take possession of the land for we can certainly do it***” (Num 13:30). Caleb had seen the same thing the other spies had seen: giants, fortified cities, powerful armies. And yet his response was completely different than his colleagues. Isn’t that true in every age? Men can look at the same data, be confronted with the same facts, experience the same events, and draw totally different conclusions. One man looks at a drop in sales and sees an opportunity to venture into other markets. Another man looks at the same number and, in despair, seeks another job. One woman is confronted with the unthinkable, ...divorce after years of marriage. She decides she will raise her children, dig deeper into her relationship with God, and discover there is life after divorce. Another dwells only on the past, wallows in bitterness, and withdraws from those around her. Human beings have an endless capacity to face danger and disappointment in vastly different ways. Some people find a way to move forward into the future with confident determination, while others wander in the desert for the rest of their lives.

The Majority Response

As soon as Caleb voiced his confident expectation that the land could be taken, the other spies balked. They had seen the same thing as Caleb, recognizing the flow of milk and honey throughout the land. But instead of affirming Caleb’s call for action now, they cowered. They offered a bad report. They did what human beings always do when they are afraid of change and immediate action. They exaggerated. Suddenly this land flowing with milk and honey “*devours those living in it.*” Following on the heels of that statement they added “*the people we saw there are of great size.*” It’s really a contradiction of statements. How can the land flow with milk and honey, and produce people of great size, and yet, be a land that devours its people? Seems to me like the land nourished its people, fed them well, and provided a place for them to grow big, tall, and strong. To make matters worse, the other spies perceived themselves as inferior, inadequate, and impotent to take the land God had promised them. The text records them saying, “***We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them***” (13:33).

These spies were defeated before they started. They embraced the grasshopper mentality. They weren’t grasshoppers. God had made them giant-killers, but they chose to see themselves as mere grasshoppers. Perhaps they acted like

grasshoppers, hiding behind bushes, hopping around from one pile of rocks to another. The scene would be almost humorous if it wasn't so often repeated by human beings of every era. Glorious ideas are proposed but "we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes." And since they seemed like grasshoppers in their own eyes, they acted like grasshoppers and ultimately they were perceived as grasshoppers. Since they took themselves as grasshoppers it was only natural others should acquiesce and view them the same way.

This grasshopper view of life is just as prevalent today as it was in Caleb's day. Men and women continue to see themselves as grasshoppers rather than giant-killers. They accept a lower version of themselves rather than hold on to the reality of God's power in their midst. Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy these words: "*For God did not give us a Spirit of timidity, but of power, of love, and of self-discipline*" (2 Tim 1:7). How often we act with timidity in the face of giants, rather than giant-killers. The churches are bombarded with the voices of those warning of a land ready to devour its inhabitants.

"We can't do that, the economy is bad."

"We can't grow, the culture is taking away our young people."

"We can't win our community to Christ. We might show disrespect to other faith claims."

On a personal level we also fall into a grasshopper mentality, failing to realize God made us giant-killers. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow." How often do we fail to try to enter the school of our dreams thinking, "Oh, they would never accept me. My SAT scores just aren't high enough."

We don't take that job or promotion because we don't believe we can handle it. We're afraid the job will be too much for us.

Some couples decide not to have children these days because they perceive the world as an evil place and they don't want to bring their kids into such a world. And these couples, and others who support their decision have plenty of facts to back them up. Crime statistics. Moral decline. Overcrowded schools. A government in debt to foreign nations. The grasshoppers always have the facts on their side. But whatever happened to "We believe in God. God will be with us. God has promised to guide and protect us. God will empower us to be salt and light for our world. We will not be overcome by the world. We will overcome the world through the power of God's Spirit." Where are all the giant-killers?

Caleb didn't care much for the grasshopper philosophy. He was not intimidated by the mere size of the inhabitants of Canaan. He had a different view of himself. He knew that the spiritual element is what really counts in a struggle for the Promised Land, and he was ready to match the Spirit of Israel against the mere size of the inhabitants of Canaan. He knew the power of consciousness on the battlefield of life. And he was right. Every victory Israel won in Canaan was because of God's power. Jericho fell

simply because of the spiritual conviction and power that it would fall. Israel's power was in its spiritual audacity, its confidence that God was on her side. The facts and raw power were always on the side of the inhabitants of Canaan, but the Lord was always with Israel. As long as they remembered that and acted on that, they prevailed. When they forgot, they reverted to grasshopper status and hid behind rocks.

I want to make sure you don't hear me or Caleb preaching a prosperity Gospel here. This is not a name it – claim it philosophy I'm advocating. I'm not asking you to name whatever you want in Jesus' name, and bam, It will happen! No, Caleb was not claiming the Promised Land because **he** wanted it. He was claiming the Promised Land because **God** had already given it to them. God had given Moses this command: *"See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged"* (Deut 1:21). Caleb wasn't being a selfish, ego-centered leader. He was spouting the power of positive thinking, "Believe yourself a winner and you will be a winner." No, the difference is subtle, so pay attention. Caleb was telling the Israelites, not that they should believe **in themselves**, but that they should believe **in God**. This isn't the power of positive thinking, it's the power of believing the promises of God and acting on those promises in obedience. And that, my friend, will make all the difference. It will make all the difference in your life, and all the difference in the life of your church.

Conclusion

The tragedy of the grasshopper spy story in Numbers 13 is that the majority report prevailed. The negative voices wept and grumbled their way into action plans, the plans to do nothing. And so, for another 40 years the Israelites wandered around in the desert, eating their manna and quail. They went east, then north, then west, then south. Just to the North was the Promised Land God had given them, but they didn't enter it. They believed too much in too little. They believed too much in their own inadequacies, too much in the size of the inhabitants of Canaan, too much in the fortifications of their cities, and too little in the God who had already demonstrated his power in Egypt and at the Red Sea. They believed they were grasshoppers, when in fact, God had made them giant-killers.

If that were the end of the story it would remain a tragedy. Caleb was voted down the day he voiced his belief in the power of God to empower the Israelites to take the Promised land. In fact, they tried to stone him because his confidence provoked their timidity, turning it to irrationality. Caleb never gave up his belief this was their Promised Land and forty-five years later, when the promised land had been occupied and the twelve tribes were being assigned their portion, Caleb came to Joshua, now leader of the nation: *"Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years... I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give*

me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day..." (Josh. 14:10-12). Can you see this 85 year old man saying, "I believed it 45 years ago, and I believe it today. Give me that mountain." And they gave him the mountain.

I suspect Jesus had something like that in mind when he said, "*Say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you*" (Mt 17:20).

My friends, you are not grasshoppers. You are giant-killers. Enter your Promised Land in obedience and confidence. Amen.