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GOD DOES NOT NEED YOUR VOTE!

Today's text: Numbers, Chaps. 13-14; Heb. 11: 1-6

Extracts:

1. “**And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel... and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.... And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.... And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!**” [Num. 13: 25-28, 33; 14: 2]
2. “**But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him**” [Heb. 11:6]

It is election time in several democratic nations around the world. During the campaigns preceding such elections, rival political parties publish their promises to the voters (electorate) in the form of a manifesto. The manifesto summarises what each party promises to do for the people if it wins the election. Barring fraudulent practices before and on Election Day, the party that wins a majority of the votes wins the election. That victory is a mandate to the winning party to implement the promises in its manifesto. In most cases, not all the promises are kept!

*In God's Kingdom, there are no elections because it is not a democracy. It is a maximum dictatorship where God is omnipotent forever [Rev. 4: 8-11]! Therefore, God does not need our votes and He does not make election promises. But He does make us promises of blessings. However, those promises are **facts and truths that must come to pass in due course** [Heb. 11:1]. Consequently, the only vote He wants from us is to trust Him and wait for His timing. But are we that patient or obedient?*

*In today's lesson, we shall study **Numbers, Chapters 13 and 14**, to understand God's reward for those who trust Him and punishment for anyone who doubts His word. **The bottom line is that God needs your faith, not your vote.***

1. What is popular can also mislead!

The children of Israel have left the foot of Mount Sinai and are now in the wilderness of Paran. As we saw last week, they have succumbed to diverse temptations of lust and pride for which they have been severely punished. Thousands of them died after eating too much meat [Num. 11: 33], and Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was struck with leprosy [Num. 12: 14-15]. Such are traumatic experiences that can wake anybody up from complacency.

True to His merciful nature [Ex. 33:19], God chose to give the children of Israel a *glimpse* of the Promised Land for them to know that His promise to their fathers, beginning with Abraham, was a fact [i.e., what can be proved with our five senses of sight, hearing, feel, smell, and taste]. Those to be sent would not come from the army, the priests or the Levites, or even the 70 elders on which God had put the Holy Spirit, lest the people could say that their report was because of their spiritual powers! Instead, God commanded Moses to send from each tribe “a ruler among them” to go and investigate the new territory [Num. 13:1].

The twelve people that were sent (see box) were ordinary people like us. They were hardly people of exceptional faith. They were ordinary people being sent for an extraordinary assignment!

SPIES SENT TO THE PROMISED LAND [Num. 13: 2-15]			
<i>Tribe</i>	Representative	<i>Tribe</i>	Representative
1. <i>Reuben</i>	Shammua	7. <i>Zebulun</i>	Gaddiel
2. <i>Simeon</i>	Shaphat	8. <i>Joseph</i> [<i>Manasseh</i>]	Gaddi
3. <i>Judah</i>	Caleb	9. <i>Dan</i>	Ammiel
4. <i>Issachar</i>	Igal	10. <i>Asher</i>	Sethur
5. <i>Ephraim</i>	Oshea [Joshua]	11. <i>Naphtali</i>	Nahbi
6. <i>Benjamin</i>	Palti	12. <i>Gad</i>	Geuel

Speaking of Elijah, James wrote that he “was a man subject to like passions as we are” [Jam. 5: 17]. Here was a man who prayed that it should not rain, and there was no rain for three-and-a-half years! The rains returned only after he had prayed again [1 Kgs 18: 42, 45]. To demonstrate that he was not different from us, Elijah ran away to hide in the wilderness from the empty threat of Jezebel, the wife of the king, Ahab, in spite of the fact that Elijah had defeated and destroyed her 450 prophets of Baal by the power of God [1 Kgs 19: 1-2]. The fact is that until we try, we can never know how much faith we have because, as the psalmist says, “by my God have I leaped over a wall” [Ps. 18: 29].

The twelve spies in deed went to the Promised Land where they spent *forty days*. They returned and prepared two reports. One was what we can call the minority (or faith-based) report, which was prepared by Caleb and Joshua [Num. 14: 6-8]. The other ten spies did the majority (or scientific) report. Let us compare the contents of the two reports:

a) *Terms of Reference*

Following the commandment of God, Moses asked the team to (1) go to the land of Canaan and spy it out, (2) check on the land, how good it was, and (3) assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current inhabitants of the land [Num. 13: 17-20].

b) *What they saw*

Both reports confirmed the word of God, namely, that the land, “surely it floweth with milk and honey, and here is the fruit of it” [v. 27]. In addition, both reports confirmed the presence of strong people and giants who dwelt in walled cities, the children of Anak [v.28]. In the rest of the country, there were the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites and the Canaanites [v. 30].

c) *Conclusions and Recommendations*

It was here that the two reports differed. The faith-based report, submitted by Caleb and Joshua, focused on the land that “is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land flowing with milk and honey.” They *acknowledged* the odds that they would face but anchored their pending victory on the Lord for “they {the people we saw} are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not” [vv. 6-9].

The scientific report, on the other hand, focused on the problems and difficulties ahead of them: “we be not able to go up against the people; *for they are stronger than we*” [Num. 13: 31]. They saw their enemies as giants and believed that their enemies saw them as grasshoppers! The land that they saw “is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof” [vv. 32-33]. There is nowhere in this report where the power, glory and promise of God were mentioned!

The “White Paper” {official position taken by the people} adopted the scientific report! All that night, the people wept. They blamed Moses and Aaron for bringing them out of the safety of Egypt. They even planned to “make a captain and let us return into Egypt” [Num. 14: 1-3]. They took stones with the aim presumably of killing Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua but for God’s swift

intervention [v. 10]. His glory appeared before the whole congregation. He wanted to disinherit them but for the intercession of Moses [v. 12]. Nevertheless, God still pronounced this severe punishment on the people:

And the Lord said [to Moses], I have pardoned according to thy word. But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Because all those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted Me these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice. Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked Me see it [vv. 20-23]

With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, the other ten spies died immediately [vv. 36-38]. The generation that believed the scientific report would not enter the Promised Land. As for the whole nation, they would now spend forty years in the wilderness, that is, one year for every one of the forty days that the spies had spent in the Promised Land [vv. 31-34]. Finally, God made it quite clear that the whole earth would continue to be filled with His glory, regardless of their attitude to His word [v. 21]. In other words, if we are not ready to trust and obey Him, He does not need our vote for His glory on earth and in heaven to be proclaimed.

2. Lessons for our walk with God

Why did the children of Israel fail the test of faith? The following should be noted:

a) *They refused to leave Egypt*

From what we have read so far [Exodus 1 – Numbers 14], it is obvious that the children of Israel still had their hearts in Egypt. It is as if God was pushing them against their wish. They cherished the blessings and the deliverance but they hated the trials and “inconveniences.” They preferred the hamburgers of Egypt [Num. 11: 5] to *manna* from heaven. They appreciated the awesome power of God, from their experience of Pharaoh’s iron rule in Egypt, but they did not see the role of faith in walking with God. Therefore, at the slightest opportunity, they always wanted to go back to Egypt [in spirit, if no longer possible physically].

We do find ourselves in a similar situation. Our worship is enthusiastic as long as the going is good and we are being blessed. The moment God wants us to move to a higher spiritual plane that requires some spiritual discipline, we begin to question His word! Was it God that actually said that or was I in a nightmare or merely daydreaming? We become tempted to look for scientific explanations for the circumstances that we are facing.

If we claim to be born again but we have not given up our worldly habits of sin and walking-by-sight, we have not left the Egypt of our past.

b) *Vox populi vox Dei!*

A common cliché that we hear is “the voice of the people is the voice of God” [*vox populi vox Dei*]. In most cases, the people’s voice is equated with the majority or popular opinion. That is why we often hear the expression, “the minority has its say but the majority has its way.” Every where the children of Israel went wrong, whether in making the Molten Calf [Ex. 32: 1-10] or in accepting the evil report of the ten spies [Num. 14: 1-10], it was because they listened to the popular or majority view.

This hangover from our democratic and secular cultures is hurting our ability to go God’s way. In many congregations, spiritual decisions are based on the majority or consensus of the decision makers, not what God has said on the matter. Many of us rush to worship in churches with the largest congregations as if large numbers are a measure of spirituality! Many are called but few are chosen and by our fruits we shall be known!

c) *Miracles depend on God’s Power, not my faith!*

Soon after God had taken the children of Israel over the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptian troops that tried to follow them, Miriam took a timbrel and danced, saying, “Sing ye to the Lord, for *He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea*” [Ex. 15: 20-21]. There is no doubt that God’s power has a major part in bringing about miracles. However, if we do not believe that God can exercise that power on our behalf, *nothing happens!* The children of Israel could not enter the Promised Land “because of unbelief” [Heb. 3:19].

The woman with an issue of blood for twelve years fought her way through the crowd to reach Jesus because she believed that she would be healed if only she could touch the hem of His garment. When she did, Jesus told her, “Daughter, be of good comfort; *thy faith hath made thee whole*” [Lk 8: 41-48]. In Jesus’ hometown, Nazareth, they underrated Him because all they saw in Him was the son of Joseph, the carpenter. The Bible records that “He could there do no *mighty works*, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marveled *because of their unbelief*” [Mk 6: 1-6]. Without faith in God, we cannot please Him, neither will He diligently reward our seeking [Heb. 11:6].

From the forgoing, we learn the following important lessons:

- 1) Never go with the crowd when you relate to God because He does not need your vote to remain God. Paul alone stood against Peter and all the

leaders of the early church when he felt that their behaviour with respect to the Gentile members of the congregation did not conform to God's word [**Gal.2: 11-14**]. Daniel was put in the lion's den because he refused to go along with the popular position to worship the image of the Babylonian king [**Dan. 6: 1-28**].

- 2) Learn to trust God and what He asks you to do because He values His word more than His name [**Ps. 138:2**]. His promises are not an election manifesto but truth and reality. He does not lie, and what He promises, He delivers [**Num. 23:19**].
- 3) As you take the steps of faith, focus on what God has assured you, not the challenges and frustrations that confront you on the way. Caleb and Joshua focused on the Promised Land and God's power to give it to them. The unbelieving ten focused on the giants of the land and their military and physical strength. The first led to faith; the second to fear. As you well know, fear is a tormenting spirit [**1 Jn 4:18**].
- 4) God uses ordinary people for extraordinary assignments. Therefore, do not expect any special treatment from God! All He has asked of you is to trust Him. So, let go and let God.
- 5) The price of disobedience is too high. First of all, you could lose or delay the promises, as we saw in the case of the children of Israel. Spiritual death looms for those who lack faith in God. That is a sin against the Holy Spirit, which can never be forgiven [**1 Jn 5: 14-17; Matt. 12: 22-32; Rev. 21: 8**].

Jesus Christ told the father of a demon-possessed son, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." The man cried out, and said to Jesus "with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" [**Mk 9: 23-24**]. As we wrestle with faith in an increasingly complex world, let us go to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and cry to Him, saying, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief."