

To Trust or Not to Trust

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[0:00] Well, there's a story, and I can't remember if I've told this before, I'm sorry, but it's of a man walking, bushwalking, very early in the morning when there's quite a heavy fog, and so it was hard to see where he was going.

He tripped and fell over the edge of a cliff, but managed to grab a tree root that was sticking out the side before he completely fell down. And the fog made seeing the bottom impossible, and so he feared for his life.

And in his fear, he cried out, help, is anyone up there? And a voice actually replied, yes, I'm here. And the man couldn't believe his luck, and he called back, well, who's that?

And the voice replied, it's God. And the man couldn't believe his ears, and with excitement, he cried, oh, God, please help me. And then God replied, do you trust me? And the man said, yes, of course I trust you.

And then God replied, well, let go. And then after a pause, the man said back, is anyone else up there? The point is, when we face fears in life, the question is, will we trust God or not?

[1:13] As Shakespeare said, to be or that is the question. Well, the question for us out of today's passage is to trust or not to trust. That is the question.

When we fear what's before us, will we trust God's word to us? Or will we let our fear outweigh our faith and turn away?

You see, today Israel is parked on the edge of the promised land. They've finally arrived. But they know there are people in the land whom they will have to fight. And so in verses 1 to 3 of our passage, chapter 13, the Lord said to Moses, go and send some men to explore the land which he is giving them.

And notice he doesn't say in verse 2, which I am about to give. He says, which I am giving the Israelites. Present tense. He's in the process of doing it, you see.

Victory is assured. And twice we're told, verse 2 and verse 3, these scouts or spies are tribal leaders. Men who are meant to be mature people of God.

[2:19] Who can then come back and inform their tribe. So their tribe will believe them and be encouraged, all of them, to go and fight and take hold of the land that God is giving them.

And to emphasize that they're from all the tribes, verses 4 to 16, list, name them and the tribe they're from. And then Moses gives them some instructions from verse 17.

And so I'm going to ask Joy to come and read our first installment. Thanks, Joy. Verse 17 on page 146 of your pew Bibles.

When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many.

What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwallled or fortified?

[3 : 27] And how is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.

It was the season for the first ripe grapes. So they went up and explored the land from the desert of Zin as far as Rehob towards Lebo Hamath.

They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron where Ahiman, Seshay and Talmei, the descendants of Anak, lived. Hebron had been built seven years before Zohan in Egypt.

When they reached the valley of Eshkol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes and two of them carried it on a pole between them along with some pomegranates and figs.

That place was called the valley of Eshkol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. And at the end of 40 days, they returned from exploring the land.

[4 : 27] Now the instructions here in verses 17 to 20 are about two things. You can group them together. Firstly, find out about the opposition.

You know, strong or weak, few or many, fortified or not. You see, they're still to march in. They're still to fight. Remember the chapter 1 census was all of the military aged men, 20 years old or more.

And so they still needed to plan unless God gave them the plan, like walking around the walls of Jericho seven times. And so trusting God here doesn't mean they let go and let God, as that saying goes.

I remember a relative of mine in his 40s at the time, a wife, a son, lost his job. And so he said to my family, oh, it doesn't matter, God will provide.

And then spent most of his days playing computer games. He seemed to think that God would just miraculously drop a job in his lap. And yes, God can do the miraculous, don't get me wrong.

[5 : 34] But he more often works through us, doesn't he? It's like teaching kids. You know, you don't always, sometimes, but you don't always just give the child the answer.

You walk them through the process. Why? Well, to teach them and help them grow. So too with us. In fact, Philippians talks about where to continue to work out our salvation.

Live it out with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us. We're still to live out our salvation, but we can do so not just reverently, but confidently, because God is also at work in and through us.

The point is trusting in God doesn't mean we do nothing. And so Moses needed to know about the opposition and to use his wisdom and to plan the best way to take the land.

But the second set of instructions were about the land. Is it good or bad, fertile or not? The other trees on it, you know, bring back some fruit and so on. And when they do go exploring, out of all the place names, two are mentioned twice in particular.

[6 : 44] The first is Eshkol, which means cluster of grapes. And did you pick up how big those grapes were? One cluster required two men to carry it on a pole.

Can you imagine how much wine you could make with that? Or how much fruit salad? One grape, whole fruit salad. You see, God has kept his promise in part.

That's why they were to explore the land, to be encouraged. Not only has God saved them from Egypt, but the land is good, just as he promised.

And so he has kept his promise in part, which was to encourage them to keep trusting that he would keep his promise in full. And the other name that is repeated twice is Hebron, which is the very place in Genesis where Abraham lived and was buried with his wife Sarah and Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Rachel, the patriarchs.

God had promised this land to. And so the writer is almost saying, remember how they trusted God to give them this land, so much so they bought some land as a burial ground, knowing that one day their descendants would come back and be with them.

[8:01] Trust the patriarchs too, in other words. And so the scouts returned and all Israel is encouraged, right? Wrong.

Ben's going to ring us our next part. So from verse 26. Thanks, Ben. Continue from verse 26.

They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land.

They gave Moses this account. We went into the land to which you sent us and it does flow with milk and honey. Here is its fruit.

But the people who live there are powerful. And the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there.

[9:10] And the Amalekites live in Nagib. The Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country.

And the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, We should go up and take possession of the land.

For we can certainly do it. But the man who had gone up with him said, We can't attack those people. They are stronger than we are.

And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, The land we explored devours those living in it.

All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw Nephilim there, the descendants of Anak, come from the Nephilim. We seem like grasshoppers in our own eyes.

[10:13] And we look the same to them. That night, all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

And the whole assembly said to them, If only we had died in Egypt or in this wilderness, why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword?

Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt? And they said to each other, We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.

More weeping, more grumbling, more wanting to return to Egypt. Not so much encouraged, are they? But notice it started with those supposedly mature leaders whose fear actually outweighed their faith and caused them to exaggerate the report, actually.

And so Moses asked, Are the people strong or weak? And they kind of said, Actually, not just strong, but powerful. Are the cities fortified or not? Well, actually, they're not only fortified, but they're very large.

[11:32] They're exaggerating the report to kind of discourage the people. They even saw the descendants of Anak there, who were apparently giants, think David and Goliath.

And so they have let their fear outweigh their faith, but not Caleb and presumably Joshua with him. They're confident they can do it.

And so Caleb takes the lead and encourages the people. And verse 30 is even more emphatic in the original Hebrew. Caleb silenced the people before Moses because they're all grumbling against Moses.

He calms them down. And then he says, We should indeed go up and take possession of the land, for we can most certainly do it. You see, Caleb is the opposite.

His faith outweighs his fear, and he encourages others to do the same. He's not like the ten, but the two encourage people to have faith.

- [12:35] But the ten refused to listen, and so they spread a bad report. And again, they exaggerate things, saying that the land will devour us. And they say it's not just the descendants of Anak who are big, but they actually say all the people in verse 32 are of great size.

Leaders have such power to impact people for good or bad, don't they? We see it in our world today, and it was the same back in Israel's day.

And so in chapter 14, verse 1, all the members have been infected with fear. And so they all raised their voices and wept aloud. Verse 2, all the Israelites grumbled against Moses.

And in verse 4, they wish they could vote out Moses and get another leader to take them back to Egypt. And so verse 5, Then Moses and Aaron fell down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there.

Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephthah, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes, and they said to the entire assembly, they're trying to encourage the people again. The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good.

- [13:49] If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into the land, a land flowing of milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land.

Because we will devour them. The land won't devour us, we will devour them. Their protection is gone. But the Lord is with us, so do not be afraid of them. Did they listen?

Verse 10. Well, the whole assembly talked about stoning them. It just escalates, doesn't it? In both ways. The two, Caleb and Joshua, plead even more emphatically, encourage them even more emphatically, that land is exceedingly good.

We can really do it. God is with us. In fact, having God with them is like fighting with armor-piercing bullets. Because the protection of the people in the land is gone, they say.

It's not going to do them any good. You see, unlike the ten, these two encourage the people not to fear, but to have faith. To trust God and so obey God.

- [14:55] But the people's response escalates to, from wanting to vote Moses out, to now wanting to stone him dead. And so now God steps in. Then the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.

The Lord said to Moses, How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me? In spite of all the signs I've performed among them, I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them.

But I will make you, Moses, into a nation greater and stronger than they. Verse 11 is the heart of the problem. And I think the key verse for our passage, they refuse to believe or trust in God.

You see, the decision about whether to enter the land or not really comes down to whether they will trust God or not, which is the title of the sermon, right? Because if you trust someone, if you have faith or believe in someone, then you will obey them.

Won't you? For example, if I say, I've got \$10 here for the first person who stands up. Stand up. She didn't fear standing up in front of you, but had faith in me.

- [16:18] And she obeyed and was rewarded. That's exactly like Israel here. Only the reward is not \$10. It's their promised land, a good land. And notice it's not, God is not demanding them to have blind belief or blind faith.

Notice in verse 11, how God adds, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them. See, God has given them every reason to believe in him, to trust and then obey him.

As I often say, the Christian faith is not blind faith. It's reasonable, rational faith. And so having been patient with him and giving them every reason to believe in him, to refuse to do so, verse 11 actually shows contempt towards him.

Contempt. It's a strong word, isn't it? But so is their reaction. And so verse 12, God declares he will destroy them, which may sound harsh to us, but if it does, it's probably because we've forgotten who God is.

Sometimes we can be so familiar with God as our heavenly father, we can forget he's still a holy and awesome God, isn't he? And so yes, we can come to him confidently, but we're also to come to him reverently.

[17:37] We're not dealing with our pet dog from last week or a fellow human being. We're dealing with the holy and awesome God of the universe. And so for Israel to show such contempt towards him by refusing to believe in him, despite all he's done for them, well, God is justified in saying he will destroy them.

But then the man they wanted to vote out now prays for them. Thanks, Andre. So let's continue from verse 13 to 19.

Moses said to the Lord, then the Egyptians will hear about it. By your power, you brought these people up from among them and they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it.

They have already heard that you, Lord, others are with these people and that you, Lord, have been seen face to face that your cloud stays over them and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, the Lord was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness.

[19:08] Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared, the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now. Here Moses appeals to God's desire and character.

And it might sound in his prayer he's trying to manipulate God, but he's not. Moses is simply praying in line or in light of what God has told him or revealed to him, like God's desire to be honoured.

And so back in Egypt, one reason God was performing these plagues was so that Egyptians will know that I am the Lord, that I am the true God, that I will be honoured as such.

[20:20] And so here Moses is praying in line with what God desires, you see. I mean, aren't we taught to pray, hallowed or honoured be your name? And I wonder how often we actually pray for this.

You know, do we pray for God to be honoured in our lives and in our world? Or do we just pray for ourselves? But here, verse 15 and 16, Moses says, if God destroys them, the nations will think that God is not able, not powerful enough to bring them into the land.

And so the nations will not honour God as the true God. You see, Moses is simply praying in line with what God has revealed about his desire. And in line with what God has revealed about his character.

Back in Exodus again, God actually declared his character. He is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, love to thousands, but only punishing to the third or fourth generation, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

And Moses almost quotes this word for word in our passage in verse 18. Slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sin, yet still showing justice, you know, not letting the guilty go unpunished.

[21 : 29] And so Moses is simply praying in line with what God has already told him. And what's more, he's praying for something good. Mercy on these people.

And mercy is a good thing, isn't it? I bet you like mercy when it happens to you. We do, don't we? But the point is, this is not a prayer of manipulation. It's a prayer in line with God's revelation, which ought to shape our prayers too, I think.

You know, we ought to use God's word where he has revealed his character and his desires. Use that in our prayers because then we are praying in line with God, aren't we?

Well, for Moses, God answers and both forgives and shows justice. So thanks, Annette. We're from verse 20.

The Lord replied, I have forgiven them as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times, not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors.

[22 : 52] No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to and his descendants will inherit it.

Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, How long will this wicked community grumble against me?

I've heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them. As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I'll do to you the very thing I heard you say.

In this wilderness, your bodies will fall. Every one of you, twenty years old or more, who has counted in the census and who has grumbled against me.

Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb, son of Jephna, and Joshua, son of Nun.

[24 : 04] As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I'll bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness.

Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For forty years, one year for each of the forty days you explored the land, you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.

I, the Lord, have spoken and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community which has banded together against me. They'll meet their end in this wilderness.

Here they will die. So the men Moses had sent to explore the land who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it.

These men, who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land, were struck down and died of a plague before the Lord. Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephna, survived.

[25 : 24] So back in verse 20, the Lord replied, I have forgiven them as you had asked. How did Moses ask?

Well, he asked God not to destroy them completely as a nation. And so God forgives them as a nation. They can continue to live as a nation. That's mercy.

But with this mercy also comes justice for the first generation in particular. And justice is a good thing too. I mean, it's why the Victorian police have issued a \$1 million reward for information about Desi who shot those two police officers because they want to see justice and we want to see justice.

And so here the whole nation will mercifully not be destroyed but God will justly judge that first generation. And verse 34, he actually says, you will bear your sins.

You will take the judgment for your sins. This is more than discipline. Discipline lasts only for a while and ends with restoration, doesn't it? I mean, you don't ground your children or grandchildren or whoever you're looking after.

[26 : 35] You don't ground them forever, do you? It's for a limited time. Even Miriam last week when she was disciplined was outside the camp for seven days and then she was able to come back in restored.

But this first generation who came out of Egypt, they will bear their sins until they die. God's anger at their rebellion will last the rest of their lives. But it is just for God will give them what they want and that's what he points out in those verses.

And they said, we should go back to Egypt. Well, God says, turn back towards the Red Sea which is towards Egypt. They said it would be better to die in the wilderness. Well, where are they going to die?

Die in the wilderness. Those who were 20 years old who were able to fight but refused to do so, well, it's the same people who will die in the wilderness. They said their children will be taken.

Well, God says, actually, I'm going to get your children to enter the land. 40 days in the good land which they rejected, well, if they don't want to have the good land, God will give them the bad land of the wilderness for 40 years.

[27 : 41] They said the Lord will let us fall by the sword which is to say that God is against us and God says, well, if that's what you think, I will be against you. But not all of them, just that first generation.

Israel 1.0, if you like. But the point is, this judgment is fitting. It is justice. He gives them what they want. And it is justice also for the 10 scouts because as leaders, they should have known better.

They were more responsible, more culpable. And so they die on the spot. Now, having seen and heard all this, surely the people will now believe and obey God, right?

Wrong again. And so in the last few verses of our chapters, Moses reported this. They sinned and said, now we are ready to go up to the land.

But Moses says, what are you doing? Don't disobey the Lord's command again. He said, you can't. You've got to turn back towards Egypt because you have sinned. You've turned away from the Lord.

[28 : 45] He won't be with you. But in their presumption, they went up anyway. They disobeyed. They didn't believe God wouldn't be with them. They just went up and disobeyed again.

And so the Canaanites beat them down. They lost. You see, instead of believing God would now not let them enter the land, they presume they can enter without him and disobey him again.

They just refuse to trust and obey, don't they? And so while I've shown you various application along the way about how God works through us, how we need to treat God as holy and awesome, how we might pray to God, the big application is what the New Testament gives us from this passage.

We heard it from our first reading in Hebrews, didn't we? And essentially, it says, don't do an Israel 1.0, the first generation. So do you remember Hebrews that talked about who were they that hurt and rebelled?

Well, it wasn't those that Moses led out of Egypt, that first generation? With whom was he angry 40 years? Wasn't it those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? To whom did God swear they would never enter his rest, that is the promised land, if it wasn't those who disobeyed?

[29 : 57] And so we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief. They did not trust. And so the big application he says is, see to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God like them.

In other words, don't do an Israel 1.0. You see, we can face all sorts of fears in life, from a fear of financial loss or unemployment to a fear of failure or persecution to a fear of health loss or a fear of death for ourselves or our loved ones.

But we're not to let those fears outweigh our faith such that we turn away from God altogether as Israel did. I like one of our members at 10.30.

He lives work contract to work contract, a 12-month contract, and he never knows if it will be renewed and he has a family to support. What's more, his eyesight is deteriorating and so it would be very easy for him to fear job loss, financial loss and health loss and let that fear outweigh his faith in God such that he says, well, God hasn't answered my prayer for a permanent job or healing of my eyes and so I've had enough.

I'm turning away from God. But he doesn't do that. He continues to have faith in God. He doesn't do an Israel 1.0 but continues to trust God which is not always easy to do, is it?

[31 : 23] And so to help, we're to encourage one another, verse 13, daily. We're to be like Caleb and Joshua who sought to encourage the people, be like the two scouts, not like the ten who spread fear.

For as it goes on to say in verse 14, it's only those who hold to Christ to the very end that will share in our promised land. And so we're not to be like the two, but, sorry, we're not to be like the ten, but the two who encourage one another to keep trusting and obeying.

It's part of why we come here to church Sunday by Sunday, isn't it? To encourage and be encouraged. It's why it's good to be part of a Bible study group, to encourage and be encouraged or meet one-to-one with people.

It's why it's good to read the Bible each day in your own quiet time so that God himself can encourage you. And we're to remember that our faith isn't blind faith either.

Israel forgot God's past deeds, but we're not to do that. Like that church member I mentioned, he remembers how God has provided for him in the past, which encourages him to keep trusting God for the future.

[32 : 32] And we're especially to remember God's past deed for us in Christ, how Jesus died to pay for our sins so that we can have full forgiveness and entry into our promised land of the new creation.

And how Jesus rose again to prove it. In fact, for us who believe in Jesus, the Bible says in Ephesians that God has already raised us up spiritually with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms.

We have one foot already there. And so we're to remember how God has already kept his promise in part through Christ, that we might be encouraged to keep trusting his promise for our future.

Like that church member we heard this morning at the start of our service. as she found out about her terminal cancer two weeks ago. Yet her faith outweighs her fear.

She doesn't let her fear outweigh her faith. For she knows what God has done for in the past and so fully trusts God's promise for her future. And so much so that she continues to not only trust but obey.

[33 : 36] She wants to keep using her remaining months to serve in whatever way she can. In fact, I think I might have mentioned last week that she even got permission to leave hospital last weekend so she could lead our 7.45am service.

And she encourages others like Caleb and Joshua, encourages others to trust too whether they're her Christian friends or non-Christian friends. She's like the two, not the ten. And certainly not like Israel 1.0.

Whatever fears you face or are facing in life, the big application, don't do an Israel 1.0. But rather, do encourage others like the two, not the ten. And do remember God's past deeds in your life and especially in Christ so that we won't let fear outweigh our faith but trust in Jesus to the very end.

Let's pray. Father, may we learn from Israel this first generation and heed the warning your word gives us.

Help us, we pray, to keep trusting in Jesus to the very end. In his name we ask. Amen.