

Seeing but not believing

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm sure many of you are familiar with the phrase, seeing is believing, or that you yourself may have retorted from time to time to time.

I need to see to believe. And if you're familiar with the account, that's exactly what the Apostle Thomas said when the other disciples told him that Jesus had risen from the dead.

And you can't blame Thomas, really, because normally it's not possible, is it, to rise from the dead? And of course, Jesus did, and when he appeared to Thomas, he rebuked him and then noted by saying that many will believe even though they haven't seen.

And then declared in John 20, verse 29, which is on the slide, Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Now, in today's story, though, we have a sort of different and almost opposite situation. Why?

Because tonight we see that the Israelites see, but still don't believe.

[1 : 07] Now, the whole story, of course, actually covers, it's covered across both chapters 13 and 14. But I thought it was too long to cover the entire section in one Sunday.

So, we're going to spread it over two Sundays. Except part two comes only in 2026. Because this is our final week in numbers for the year.

I'm just taking a trick out of these TV producers, you know, where they always end the series on a cliffhanger, so you have to tune in next time. So, hopefully, you'll come back or stick around until next year, at least.

All right, so let's begin in verse 1 of chapter 13, where we read that Moses, the Lord said to Moses, Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites.

From each ancestral tribe, send one of its leaders. So, at the Lord's command, Moses sent them out from the desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites.

[2 : 10] Now, Julia has already done the job of reading out that list, so I won't do it again. They don't mean much, really, except two names, Joshua and Caleb, are of significance, and we'll get to them in a short while.

These names, however, are different from the ones in chapter 1. We don't really know why. It could be that these were the younger, more able-bodied men that could go scout, climb hills and mountains, that kind of stuff.

Whereas the ones in chapter 1 were sort of the elderly statesmen. But regardless, in verse 17, 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? 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.

[3 : 19] It was the season, we're told, for the first ripe grapes. And so clearly, we see the instruction from Moses is to see, right? Observe closely in order to report back to the people.

And two things they were asked to look out for. Number one, see what the land is like. Number two, see what the inhabitants are like.

And so with the land, is it good or bad? Is the soil fertile or poor? Are the trees, what kind of trees are in it? And what kind of fruit grow on these trees? As for the people, the question is, are they strong or weak?

Many or few? And the cities, are they fortified? The ones they live in. And you can understand why these details are important.

Because the question is, is the land God's giving to them just as He has promised? And what is then required to attain it? And one further thing, Moses says, try and bring back some fruit of the land.

[4 : 23] Because that will give the people a glimpse of just how good the land is. And you know, it's probably a bit too bad that they didn't have cameras in those days, or videos.

Because, you know, they can just put on a special screening of their tour upon their return. As some of you might do when you come back from your holidays. And so off they went in verses 21 and 22. And we are told the territory that they traverse. And again, probably these things, these details don't mean much to us. But it probably indicates just how much ground was covered.

And also highlighted some significant places like Hebron. Then in verse 23, we see just how fertile the land is. For when they reached the Valley of Eskol, and the meaning of that word is cluster, self-evident, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes.

Two of them carried on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. That place was called the Valley of Eskol because of the cluster of grapes that the Israelites cut off there.

[5 : 35] And so this was a really enticing and eye-watering scene, isn't it? Two grown men carrying a cluster, a single cluster of grapes on a pole.

Not to mention the pomegranates and figs as well. I managed to see that in the morning sermon that found this graphic. So you might want to just have a quick look.

I don't know. Has anyone carried a cluster of grapes that big before? No. Didn't think so, right? So it was really abundant, isn't it?

Really fruitful, this land. And so when they returned, they reported what they saw. Verse 26. Now that phrase, This flow with milk and honey, that's one that God has been repeatedly using in Exodus and Leviticus, like this one in Leviticus, every time He promised Israel the land that He was about to give them.

And so the fact that the leaders repeat this phrase shows actually that they are well aware of God's promises to them. They knew this was what God had told them.

[7 : 08] Now, instead though of saying, Wow, hey, this is a land flowing with milk and honey, guys, is exactly what God has promised. What they say in verse 28 is, But, right?

But the people who live there are powerful and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Malachites live in the Negev, the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country, and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.

And so, instead of concentrating on what God has said, His promises, they were instead looking at the size of these inhabitants. And no doubt these guys were probably big, alright?

But you can see the leaders really trying to convince and play it up, right? They're naming every nation in the land to tell the people, Hey, there's no spare land here, right?

It's not that there's some unoccupied place that we can just go move in. No, no, everything's taken. And they're slowly trying to build a case that, Nah, if we have to take the land, we're going to have to go fight them.

[8 : 16] And, nah, it's getting a bit hard. Caleb, however, one of the twelve, disagreed. And he could see what was going on. I think maybe, you know, on the way back, the twelve had been discussing and sort of working out, Hey, hey, hey, what are we going to say when we get back?

And so he could pick up the vibe that these people, the other ten of the leaders, that they were not for this, and they were going to dissuade the people. And so he tries to get in first to arrest what might be about to happen.

And you can tell that the people already were starting to murmur, right? Because in verse 30, he had to silence them and say, Hey, hey, just calm down. And then he said, We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.

Now, we don't know, but it seems like he couldn't really say much more than that, right? Because the other man who had gone with him probably interjected at this point and said, No, 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.

[9 : 31] All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there. The descendants of Adak come from the Nephilim. We seem like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.

Now, the Nephilim, if you go back all the way to Genesis, they hailed from the time of Noah. And yes, they were indeed giants. But look at the kind of language that they're using here. They're saying that the land devours those living in it. But hang on, they just said the land was flowing with milk and honey. How is it devouring people? Like, is it going to open up and just swallow people?

And if it was flowing with milk and honey, or if it was devouring those living in it, how is it that all these annex and other Amalekites, they could be strong and healthy?

It sort of doesn't make sense, does it? And then this whole point about grasshoppers, I don't know where they got it from. Did they ask the descendants or take a picture next to them to see whether they were like grasshoppers, comparative?

[10:32] And so what was meant to be a good report of the land just as God had promised, is now turned into a bad report. And the aim really is just to arouse fear in the hearts of the people, to stir up their anxiety and fear about going to take the land.

And you know what? Sadly, the people responded as expected. Verse 1 of chapter 14. 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.

Now, I know that at the time that this all happened, the book of Numbers had not been written down. So it's not like they could have just turned back to chapter 11 and 12 and sort of remind themselves what happened, right?

[11:47] But for us who have been studying these chapters one week at a time, it's all a bit familiar, isn't it? Déjà vu. And what we see here now is an encore, aren't they?

They're repeating their performance even after God's punishment. They have experienced and felt God's punishment through the other incidents as well.

And so it seems like nothing has sunk in, has it? Now, remember how they wailed and grumbled before? And what happened? Many died as a result, didn't they?

Did they not remember that? That was the thousands, wasn't it? Last time they pined for meat and they wanted to go back to Egypt, remember? Have their melons, leeks, and cucumbers.

You know, the three meat and three veg kind of meal. Well, now they're going back. They want to go back to Egypt, but look at what they want there. It's even more ludicrous, isn't it?

[12:46] They're not going back there to enjoy life. They're saying, no, let's go back there to die.

Or, no, no, let's just die right here in the wilderness. And really, if you think about it, if you're going to die anyway, why not at least go and try and take the land?

So, at least you might have that chance of inheriting that promise that God has given to you. But no, we would rather just die right here. And then to cap it off, they say they want to choose another leader to take them back to Egypt.

Now, again, had they not just seen what happened to Miriam when she questioned God's authority and her choice of leader?

You know, sometimes, as parents or teachers, you know, our children or our students, they make mistakes repeatedly, but, you know, we continue to give them multiple chances, right?

Because we can see that they are trying. They're trying their best to do what's right. But here, there is no indication of that, is there? No.

[13:52] Israel have not learned anything. They're not trying to please God. They're just being stubborn and rebellious again. And so it's no wonder that in verse 5, Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole assembly.

Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, who were among them, also tore their clothes. All of these are signs of deep frustration and exasperation.

If it were me, I would try and pull my hair out, even though I didn't have much to do. But this exasperation is not because, not solely because, the people were not listening to them.

It's not like, oh, I'm trying to teach you, you don't listen to me. No. What they were so deeply frustrated with was that their act was a rebellion against the Lord.

That was the more grievous sin. God has meant to bless them, to give them His promises. He merely instructs them to trust and obey, and instead, they're going to rebel instead.

[15:00] Now, not everyone, of course, because there were two, weren't there? Joshua and Caleb, who now give their minority report in verse 7. It's almost their last chance to try and sway the people.

And so they say, the land we pass through and explored is exceedingly good. Right? In contrast to the bad report, this is a good report.

The land is not bad, but exceedingly good. It's not going to devour us, as the others have said, because it flows with milk and honey to nourish us and feed us, just as God has promised.

And so, if the Lord is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. And so, they're almost pleading with Him, look, remember, remember God's promises to us, and remember His power to deliver us.

This is the same God who defeated Pharaoh, who has led us through the wilderness all the way up to now. And so they plead, only do not rebel against the Lord.

[16:10] Because every time they had rebelled against the Lord, whether it's the golden calf, whether it's about complaining that they had no water, whether that they were grumbling about not having meat, it never ends well for them, does it?

And so they go on, do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Right? Again, opposite. The land's not going to devour us. Rather, we will devour them.

Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them. Now, Joshua and Caleb saw exactly the same things that the other leaders did, right?

Through their physical eyes. Yes, the Anak's and the others were strong and mighty. Yes, the land was flowing with milk and honey. But, Joshua and Caleb also saw, with Moses and Aaron, something more which the others and the people did not see.

These extra things they saw, they saw with the eyes of faith. They saw God's promises being fulfilled. They believed strongly in that vision of the future, even though it couldn't yet be seen with the physical eyes, because it hasn't come to pass.

[17:39] And those eyes of faith makes all the difference to their report. It allowed them to interpret what they saw different to everyone else.

That this land is good and will be ours. Not because we're stronger, but because the Lord who is with us is. That He will deliver us, deliver the inhabitants into our hands.

that their protection is gone. Even if we're grasshoppers, we will overcome them. Look, I want to stress again, all the leaders saw physically the same things.

It's not like Joshua and Caleb went to a different part of the land and saw something different. They all saw the same things, but seeing with the eyes of faith gave Joshua and Caleb the added dimension of reality that changed their view entirely.

And so I want to say that without faith, our faith, our view of reality is actually distorted. Because without faith, it has not affected, our views of life has not affected in what is most important in this world.

[18:56] That there is a powerful and sovereign creator who loves and rewards those who believe in him. So, friends, let's not be deceived by living life by only seeing things physically.

And you will be deceived because true reality comes only when we also have the eyes of faith that trust God in his word and promises and knows that it is by his power and commitment that these things will come to pass.

We need to live life not just with physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith as well. Now, here's the spoiler alert. Joshua and Caleb, sadly, you probably know this, if you just look at verse 10, they are plea false!

false! on deaf ears. And we also read that, or Jenny did, in Hebrews chapter 3. But, you know, one thing I just want to say, you know those 12 leaders that we read out at the start?

I don't know, it's like, it's probably when they first got called out, you know, let's go, tribe of Reuben, Shammuah, come forward. You know, he went to God, wow, I got chosen.

[20:13] I'm one of the, wow, I'm going to be, I'm special. You know, I got chosen for this special role to go into the land. And, you know, they might have been thinking, us 12, one day, our names will appear on the honor roll of the heroes who went into the land.

But, as we read this today, I mean, what list is this? It's not an honor roll, is it? It's a list of shame, isn't it?

I mean, they don't appear anywhere else. And yet, we know the 12 people, only two of which, Caleb and Joshua, but everyone else, they all failed to exercise faith, didn't they?

And now, we can read them for eternity as the 10 people that let down the people of Israel. Right? And not only them, how about, you know, we think that all of them were complaining, but I think there were some that were just standing by passively, letting the, you know, the big mouths do all the talking.

But if you're a man above 20 years old, and you stood by passively, just letting everything go on, what happened to you? Well, they ended up, each of them, dying in the wilderness.

[21 : 32] They wandered 40 years, and none of them got into the land. And, you know, ironically, they all got their wish, didn't they? You remember what they said?

Let us die in the wilderness? Well, that's what they got, isn't it? Every one of them, 20 years and above, or 21 years, they died because they did not stand with Jacob, sorry, Joshua and Caleb to say, no, we can take this land because God has promised it to us.

And so, friends, that's the same with us, isn't it? We each have to make that response for ourselves, not stand back and let others do it. We need to exercise that faith.

And friends, anyone who's read the Bible, who's heard the good news of Jesus, we have now heard God's voice. And that voice says, repent and believe in Jesus as the only way to salvation. The only way that we can be saved from our selfish and sinful nature, have our relationship restored with God, is through faith in Jesus.

And you know, a lot of times we can hear it, we can hear God's Word even, and we can decide, oh, not today, I'm just going to ignore this. But friends, when we ignore God's Word, it's not without consequence because that is tantamounting to rejection of the Lord and His authority.

[22 : 55] That's why, again, Jenny read from Hebrew saying, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion. And the rebellion here is the one that we're looking at right now in numbers.

And so friends, the very first thing we need to do is not harden our hearts against the good news of Jesus. And if you're here today and you've not yet committed yourself to Christ, you need to hear God's voice and then decide not to harden your hearts.

But believe that Jesus is the only way of salvation, that actually we need salvation, that our own efforts and good deeds are not going to cut it because self-reliance is a symptom, not a cure for pride.

Only when we trust in Jesus, that's the first step, that's the first thing we do by exercising our eyes of faith.

But then, it also means that we continue to exercise and use those eyes of faith to live according to what we believed until the very end.

[24 : 10] If we believe Jesus is Savior and Lord, then we need to live in light of this truth. We will reject selfish living. We will see the temptations in this world and we decide, no, I will not follow along that way.

We will be faced with suffering and trials and we will say, no, I believe that God will see me through it if only I obey Him.

And of course, we want to use the eyes of faith to look forward right to the new creation which God has promised and to see that for us, that is the land that is exceedingly good.

And then, whenever we are challenged by trials and persecution in this life, those are the giants of our faith, as it were, we say that God has given those things to us so therefore we can overcome by the blood of Jesus but also overcome by being obedient.

And friends, just a reminder, we've been looking at numbers for the last, you know, I don't know how many weeks but over the last 13 chapters and it's not like Israel has disobeyed God in everything, right?

[25 : 24] Because for the first 10 chapters, we heard again and again that Moses instructed them and they obeyed what the Lord had commanded Moses. But, you know, in a sense, those things were easy, weren't they?

The real test comes when their faith is being tested and that's when, sadly, they rebelled because they did not want to trust the Lord. And that's the same with us.

There will be things that we find easy about being a Christian, coming to church, tithing, whatever. But, the true test comes when our faith is being tested.

That's when we really need to cling to the promises of God and know and believe that God is trustworthy, that what He promised, He will fulfill.

And so, the writer also says in that passage that Jenny read, just a verse earlier, we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

[26 : 26] What he's saying there is that faith, the Christian faith, is not just about believing once and set and forget, isn't it? Because we are to hold to our original conviction, that is the thing that we believe at the very start, but hold it to the very end by living with the eyes of faith.

Now, some of you, many of you would not be old enough to remember this, but when I was young there were comic books around, you know, the paper ones, not Kindle or whatever. And they would often have ads in the comic books, right, to try and sell you stuff.

And one of them is this one on the slide here. It's only for a dollar. But, you know, at the time, for a dollar, we could supposedly buy these miraculous x-ray vision spectacles.

You know, I don't know whether you can read the fine print, but, you know, you're meant to be able to see the bones in your hand or the yolk in the egg, all sorts of other things. And, you know, of course, naughty teenage boys would fall for the scam because they think they could see through everything, kind of thing.

But, of course, it was a lot of rubbish. Right? A waste of money. And just so you know, I didn't buy it, so that's fine. It was tempting, but no, I didn't. Some of my friends did and had a look and it was a scam.

[27 : 49] Now, I mean, why am I saying all this? God's Word is not a scam, but when we look at the world through God's Word, we are given extra special vision.

All right? not this fake stuff, but the real stuff. Because what we see through the eyes of faith is a vision of true reality.

We tend to think that what we see in front of us with the physical eyes is the truth. But actually, if you live life without faith, without the eyes of faith, everything you look at in life is actually half true. true. It does not have the full reality because you're not looking at through what God has promised those who obey Him. And so, friends, I want to encourage you, when you head out into the world, you will be turning on, watching stuff on social media, turning on the TV, hearing people tell you things, looking at what's happening at work, at uni and stuff.

that is all things that we see with the physical eyes. What we then need to do is say, Lord, help me to look at all of these things through the eyes of faith as well so that I have a true understanding, so that I have true vision of what is really, what is real because this is what you have promised will happen.

[29 : 20] God has given us this exceedingly good land which will end up in the new creation. We have it because of Christ Jesus.

It's ours. The warning in tonight's passage is, only let us not rebel against the Lord. When we hear His word, believe, don't rebel.

Let's pray. Father, when we are tempted to fear, give us the courage to believe. Help us to live by faith in Your word, not by sight, alone.

Teach us to hold firm to the conviction that Jesus has saved us from our sins and keep us in this life of faith until our day of final redemption in the new creation.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.