

Numbers 16

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[0 : 0 0] We read there, verse 6, the words of Joshua and Caleb as they spoke to the grumbling, complaining Israelites.

And you see how they were two of the twelve spies that came back, but they had a different report. And they said to all the congregation of Israel, this is towards the end of, into verse 7.

And they said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, the land which we passed through to spy it out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.

Only do not rebel against the Lord, and do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us.

Do not fear them. I suppose one of the questions we always have to ask ourselves is, how do we deal with a crisis when it comes into our life?

[1 : 0 7] Of course, some crises that we, every so often when we face a crisis, and of course it's in varying degrees, sometimes they are of our own making, but often they're not.

Often things happen in our lives that really throw us upside down. They challenge us. They bring us to question many of the things that we've often held to and believed in.

And often at a crisis time, we really face up and have to deal with things maybe that we'd never had to deal with before, or we're challenged in ways that throw us in different directions.

Well, here we find Israel, they're facing a crisis, and it was a crisis, we have to say, of their own making. It ought not to have been a crisis. They made a crisis out of something that wasn't in and of itself a crisis.

We read there of how the spies, these spies, we hadn't read if we had gone through the other chapters, we'd have read in detail what had happened when Israel came to the borders.

[2 : 1 5] They came to Kadesh Barnea. When they came to the borders of the land of promise, Moses chose 12 spies, one out of each of the tribes, and sent them to spy out the land that they were going into.

And, of course, when the spies came back, 10 of the spies gave a bad report. They said, yes, it's a wonderful land.

It is a land flowing with milk and honey. Literally, it was a land that was so fertile. It was a land that they'd spent, remember, quite a long time in the desert. And they were looking at this land, and it was so fruitful, and it was so arable, and it was just a land which they were saying, it's a dream land.

It's everything that we would want, but we haven't a hope. You should see the people who live there. You should see the cities.

They're huge, fortified cities. And you should see the people who live in these cities. Some of them are giants, the Nephilim. And at that particular word there, Israel, it tells us how their hearts failed, and they thought, that's it.

[3 : 26] And these 10 of the spies said, we don't have a chance. We're finished. There is actually no point in us going up to fight.

And so we find then that Joshua and Caleb came forward. And they really said, everything that these men have said is rubbish. Yes, it is a land flowing with milk.

It's a wonderful land. But they said, look, God has promised us this land. God is with us. All we do is follow on with the Lord, and we will conquer.

And Israel were so angry against Joshua and Caleb that they picked up stones to stone them. And that's what I want us to look at tonight, is just the courage and the faith of Joshua and Caleb, and what they based that courage and faith on, and to help us to see as we confront our own enemies and our own giants as we go through life.

Now, when God took Israel out of Egypt, he could have taken them directly to the land of promise. But he didn't, because he needed to spend time with them.

[4 : 42] And they camped for close to my year in the Sinai Desert near Mount Sinai. And in there, if you go through the book of Exodus, God had to establish with Israel, first of all, his law, and then his worship.

Because if, I know sometimes you go through, and it can sometimes be quite, to a certain extent, you need a lot of focus when you go through and you read all the measurements of the tabernacle and all the instructions that were given out.

And I suppose unless you have an architectural mind and such like, you might say to yourself, well, this is quite repetitive. But there was a pattern to it all. And God was building this particular place of worship in the wilderness, the tabernacle, for himself.

And everything in it was symbolic. Everything was talking about himself and the salvation that was to come in and through Jesus Christ. So much of it was symbolic. So God was, before they would go into the land of promise, was establishing the principle of worship and the form of worship and everything involved in it.

And the whole sacrificial system, everything pointing to Jesus Christ. And also he was giving them the law, where there was the Ten Commandments and all that followed on from that.

[6 : 04] So that's why they were encamped there for just over a year, a year and a bit. And now the time had come where the Lord was saying, I'm going to take Israel forward.

Now, I'm quite sure that in that year and a bit, while Israel were encamped there, a lot of them would be saying, oh, come on, what on earth is going on here? And I'm sure a lot of them ran out of patience.

And they were saying, look, I thought we were going to the land of promise. Because when they left Egypt and when they crossed the Red Sea and they came into the desert, they were full of enthusiasm, although there was a huge challenge for them at the Red Sea.

And again, they really thought that their days were up. But as the Lord took them on step by step, they were thinking, well, it won't be long. But then it went on, week went into week and month went into month.

And then it went over a year and they still hadn't gone very far. And I'm sure a lot of them were saying, what on earth is going on? Well, as we say, God was wanting to establish the form of worship.

[7 : 07] He was wanting to establish the law amongst them. But he was also needing to deal with them because they weren't ready to go into the land of promise. There was too much of Egypt still within them.

Because, unfortunately, Israel had begun to dabble with idolatry in Egypt. And God needed to break that. Because if he took his people into the land of promise and gave them the blessing, it wouldn't be a blessing.

And God, you know one of the strange, well, it's not as strange, but sometimes God says to us, and this is one of the verses in Scripture, God waits that he may be gracious. We've got to learn that.

Sometimes God will stop us and hold us back from progressing any further because we're not ready for the blessing. And sometimes the blessing that God intends for us would not be a blessing if he was to bring it into our lives.

Because we are not spiritually ready for it. Because one of the hardest things for us often to learn is patience. And if we are completely impatient before the Lord, then it shows us that we're not in the right place.

[8 : 24] We're not ready. And so that's one of the things. When you follow God's history, God's dealings with his people, it seems to be so often, stop, start, stop.

Stop for a long time. Then start, and sometimes when it starts, it goes. And then stops. Because God is so concerned with all his people, he wants the best for them.

And God does that personally with ourselves. There are many times we're stopped. He will stop us in our attacks when he sees us, when we're losing our focus, when we're going the wrong way, when we've sort of gone, if we're backsliding or whatever.

God will stop us. Sometimes he will knock us, and it's to say, look, I'm dealing with you. And we need to listen to what God is saying to us.

Because our soul, you have no idea. I have no idea how precious our soul is in God's sight. Do you know how precious it is? It's as precious as the life of Jesus.

[9 : 30] That's how much God loves your soul. That he sent Jesus, he sent the second person of the God, he sent his only begotten son into the world to die for you.

That's how precious your soul is to him. So he's not going to just not care about you in this world. He's not going to let you just drift any old way.

He loves you, and he wants the best for you. And if that means stopping you, he'll stop you. If it means holding you back, he'll hold you back until you're ready.

And we're so impatient. I know what I'm talking about, because there's times I've fought against the Lord. Inside, times I cannot understand what God is doing, but he waits in order that he may be gracious.

And it was very obvious that Israel were not ready to go into the land of promise. And that showed in the reaction to the spies report.

[10 : 33] And anyway, we find that Israel, when the spies came back with a bad report, we find them weeping and wailing. And see what they say?

They're actually saying, we would rather, we wish we had never been taken out of Egypt. We're going to get new leaders. We're going to go back to Egypt. We want, we would rather die in the wilderness. Do you know that's what they said?

We would rather die in the wilderness than go in to this place and be killed there. And do you know what the Lord said to them? I'm going to give you what you want.

You know, we need to be very, very, very careful what we say before God. Because the Lord is saying to them, I've heard what you've said. You are actually saying, we would rather die in the wilderness than go into that land and be killed there.

The Lord's saying that, you weren't going to be killed in that land. I was going to take you in. I was going to go before you. I was going to give you victory in the battles. You're not listening to me.

[11 : 37] You're not prepared to come with me. I'm going to give you what you want. Be very careful what you say before the Lord because Israel got what they wanted.

We read that. That was part of the judgment. God said to them, all of the spies are going to die of the plague except Joshua and Caleb. They're going to go into the land.

But not until years later because this whole nation are going to die. All the ones who've grumbled and complained. All those who have said, we want to die in the wilderness.

They will die in the wilderness. But their families, they're going to go in and inherit the land. Now we're not to take by this that God gives up on us.

That's not what God is doing. But God is giving, this is a picture of what God is. This is one of the most solemn parts of Scripture where we see how dangerous it is to speak in our own way before God.

[12 : 43] And as I said, we must be careful what we ask for because we can't treat God lightly. We can't just sort of deal with God in a sort of careless manner because God takes us.

He takes us at our word. Now this doesn't mean that God, every time that we go wrong or every time that we grumble or every time that we're filled with unbelief, God says, that's it.

I'm abandoning you. No, He never will. He will never abandon us. This was a severe part of judgment. It was showing the severity and the judgment of God but also showing how dangerous it is to say certain things to the Lord.

But what I want to, that's a whole other area. What I want us to focus on tonight is the courage and the faith of Joshua because these men, they stood alone.

It wasn't easy. When you have all these people praying for their blood, they were picking up stones to stone them and yet they were prepared to stand on the side of the Lord.

[13 : 51] And why did they stand on the side of the Lord? Well, first of all, very simply, they believed the word of the Lord. Back in chapter 13 at the beginning, the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel.

From each tribe of their fathers, you shall send a man, every one, a chief among them. See what he said? The Lord is saying into the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel.

I'm giving. This is, in other words, the Lord has said to them, look to Moses and Moses would convey this to spy. Here are the title deeds. That's really what the Lord is saying. See the land across there.

Here you are. You're at the borders at Kadesh Barnea. See all that land there. It's yours. Here are the title deeds. But send out the men to spy because the Lord, the Lord works most of the time.

Sometimes he works in supernatural ways. But most of the time he works through us in ordinary ways. And that's what was happening here. It was a military campaign and it was military strategy.

[15 : 04] Send out the spies to spy at the land, but I'm going to be with you all the way. And so Joshua and Caleb, they believed the Lord. It was very simple. Yes, they came back and they said, yeah, there are giants.

We saw the Nephilim. Yes, there are fortified cities, but so what? Yes, there are giants. You know, sometimes we read this and we say, ah, they were great men.

And then we look at Israel and we say, ah, what failure. But you know, sometimes in our own personal lives, we fail as well. Because we're often confronted by giants that we think are too much for us.

The giants of temptation, the giants of trials, the trials, the giants of uncertainty as we live out our life day by day. Sometimes as Christians, we're, like Israel, we're riddled with unbelief.

And you know, unbelief is one of the worst sins. We sometimes categorize sins and we put them into different compartments and we put them into different lists and we say, ah, well, that's a really serious sin.

[16 : 19] That's not so bad. Well, if we're going to categorize them, let me say that unbelief is right up there. Right up, along with idolatry, right up, it's one of the worst sins, the most offensive sins before God.

Sometimes we don't understand that. Unbelief is doubting the power, the authority, the majesty, the word of God. It's doubting so much about God, about who he is, about his promises.

And if we have unbelief in our hearts, ask the Lord tonight, Lord, forgive me. Like the man in the New Testament who came to Jesus and he said, oh Lord, I believe, but help thou my unbelief.

because so often we face these giants as well. The giant of temptation, what a giant that is. You know, sometimes we wish we weren't tempted.

I often say, oh, wouldn't it be wonderful not to be tempted? But you know, it's one of the regulatory things the Lord uses in our lives because we are actually strengthened as we resist temptation.

[17 : 26] It's hopeless giving in and sometimes, you know, there are periods in our lives when it's the easy thing to give in, to give in, to give in, to give in. But that doesn't strengthen us and the Lord is working in us, in us and through us and we've got to ask the Lord for help and the Lord actually promises help because we read in 1 Corinthians, no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

God is faithful who will not let you to be tempted beyond your ability but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape that you might be able to endure it.

See, God wants us to be victorious. He wants us to rely on himself. Now, I've said it often enough, 100 times out of 100 if we face temptation and try and deal with it on our own we will fail.

You will never, ever, ever win on your own. And that's a lesson sadly we have to learn. It is only with God's help and God's grace.

Never be too proud to ask God for help. Never think you're strong enough to fight on your own. You're not. I'm not. We always need God's help and he's always willing to give us that help.

[18 : 49] So we face all kinds of struggles. Maybe there are some people tonight and one of your great struggles is the whole area of assurance or salvation. Maybe tonight you're doubting you're a Christian and you're doubting it all the time.

Maybe you've never professed publicly the Lord. You've never come to the table because you think you're a Christian. You believe you're a Christian and then you say I don't know if I am a Christian.

And you're riddled, you're struggling with this. The thing is this. Have you come to the Lord? And you say to Yeshua oh I come to the Lord.

I come to the Lord over and over and over again. Is that your desire? Yes, it's my desire to come to the Lord. Well, what does the word say? Him or her that comes to me I will in no wise cast out.

I will never ever, ever, ever, ever cast out anybody who comes to me. That's God's word. God's word. Is it not unbelief or lack of faith or lack of belief that is clinging to that?

[19 : 55] That's what we've got to accept that. If you have come to the Lord, if you have asked the Lord to be Lord of your life and this is your desire above all, then the Lord is not going to turn you away.

So we've got to believe that word. We've got to accept that word. And that's why it's so important to fix ourselves, base our thing, our standing upon what the Lord has said.

Again, so often in life we're crippled through the anxieties and the burdens and the cares of life. And you know something? The Lord knows that life is actually too much for any one of us.

And that's why he says, we sang about it in Psalm 55, we're to cast our burden upon the Lord. We are to cast our anxieties upon him.

Casting all your cares upon him because he cares for you. Commit your way or roll your way unto the Lord. Right throughout scripture it's telling us over and over and over again, look, you cannot bear the burdens of life on your own.

[21 : 08] It'll crush you. But we try to because somehow we think we can manage ourselves or the world will tell us it's a sign of weakness.

You know, a lot of people say, huh, Christianity, it's only for weaklings. It's only for people who can't cope. It's not for real men or real women. It's only for people who need a crutch in life.

You know, it's one of the discoveries. You know, there's a lot in that that's actually true. It's one of the difficult discoveries of life to realize that we can't really make it through in life.

We certainly cannot make our way to heaven on our own. Nobody can. Not one person has ever in the whole history of this world ever on his or her own made their way to heaven themselves.

Impossible. That is why Jesus has come to make that way and to take us along the way. And he's saying, look, you don't know the way.

[22 : 16] I am the way. The only way is to come with me. Let me be king and lord of your life. And that is what we've got to do.

And we have to learn to cast our life, our all, upon Jesus and to go with him. And you know, when we do that, the Lord then gives us strength and he gives us courage to do the impossible.

And you know, that's one of the amazing things because a lot of people look on Christians, and particularly people within the church, who might say, I would love to be a Christian, but I could never really be a Christian because I don't have the courage.

I could never stand up in front of people and say, hey, I'm a Christian. I could never go in front of the session and say, I'm the Lord has saved me. I don't have the strength, I don't have the courage.

I'm not that, not that, you know this, the Lord will give you the courage. Because when you go through the Bible, you will find that faith and courage are linked.

[23 : 27] God's people, if you go through the people, if you go right back to Noah, it took tremendous courage to build that ark.

It took tremendous faith to build that ark. Because it would appear from the flood that things happened. There was a huge change in the whole way of the world when this flood came.

And Noah was dealing with areas that he had never, no experience of. For 120 years, he hammered and he cut and he built and he preached.

Tells us that he was a preacher of righteousness. Now that took some courage and it took some faith. But you work your way all the way down, whether it's David going out to confront the giant Goliath.

David, the little shepherd boy, back in the fields, too young to enlist in the army. And yet he's the one who would do what not one soldier.

[24 : 36] All the Israelite soldiers from Saul down quaked with fear when Goliath strutted his stuff. But David said, I'll take him on.

That was faith. That was courage. And that's the way it works. Like the ladies who went to anoint Jesus. And they were saying, who is going to move that huge giant stone for us?

Don't have the strength. But they went forward by faith. And as they did so, the stone was already moved. You know this, it's one of the great things, and it will be repeated in your own life.

You will find that God, as you move by faith, will give you the courage. In the situations. So don't worry about not having the courage. The Lord will give you all the courage that you need.

And so we find that Israel spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. I often wonder what Caleb and Joshua thought 40 years later as they entered into the land of Canaan.

[25 : 43] Joshua was the leader then. and as Joshua and Caleb had the sword by their side, and as they walked across the plain, coming to Jericho.

For these two men above all, what thoughts they had. Because they had seen a whole generation die. And they were saying, you need not have died.

Not one of them need have died. They could have all gone in like Joshua and Caleb. All these wasted years wandering because of unbelief.

Unbelief. It's a crippling sin. Don't let unbelief spoil and ruin your Christian life. Because you know sometimes, as Christians, unbelief, once you allow it, it's a horrible seed.

And it begins, once it takes root, it begins to distort. Let me tell you, it will completely take your focus right off Jesus Christ. And you'll begin to see things and issues and people and all this.

[26 : 51] We need to focus all the time upon Jesus. That was the secret of all these great men and women in Scripture. Their focus was on the Lord.

Daniel went to pray with the threat of being thrown into the den of lions. Did he look at the den of lions? Did he look out and say, oh, things have changed.

I can't pray anymore. No, his focus was completely on the Lord. Never altered, never changed. That was the courage. And it was a courage that was built upon faith because his faith was focused upon the Lord.

That is the way that Joshua and Caleb operated. And that must be the way that you and I operate as well. we must have our trust in the Lord.

So as we face our own personal giants, our own sin, our own troubles, our own problems that we face in life, ask the Lord to give you that courage, to give you that faith.

[27 : 55] Because remember, as we said earlier on, he loves you far more than ever you know. he will never ever turn away from you.

You might turn away from him for a while, for a week, for a month, for a year, for years. You might be a Christian and you look back after years and you say, oh, my Christian life has been virtually non-existent.

To the extent you say, am I a Christian at all? And the Lord says, he who has begun a good work in you. Well fulfilled, well continued. The Lord says, I just don't.

The Lord never, ever, ever abandons. He never gives up. He never changes his love. He never falls out of love. His love is continuous.

Lay hold upon that truth. Move forward focused upon him. And tonight, if unbelief has been keeping you back from throwing in your lot with the Lord Jesus, ask the Lord tonight to help you to take you over it.

[29 : 05] And maybe you're saying, you know, and it might be true, what's holding you back is fear. The fear of the unknown. The fear of how you will be as a Christian in this community.

The fear of what people will say. And it's not just with young people, peer pressure exists. it's with middle-aged, and it's also with the elderly.

What will people say? At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what people say. What matters is what the Lord says. But you know the one thing that people will say over and over and over again when they become Christians?

It's that the people that they feared most, the people that they thought, what will they say when I become a Christian? Christian are often the first people to congratulate them.

And sometimes say, I wish that was me. It's amazing how often. I remember that very thing happening with myself. One or two of the people that I thought, what will they say?

[30 : 11] I remember one in particular say, I wish that was me. Blew me away. Because I was afraid. What will people think? You make sure that you close in with Jesus and he will do you good.

Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us and we pray that we might be given the faith, given the courage, given the belief to go on looking to Jesus, believing in him.

Help us to learn the lessons that are there for us and to see what a sin and belief is. Deliver us, Lord, from it. We pray to protect us and guide us as we journey through life, facing all its challenges, its difficulties, its problems, its opportunities.

And we pray, Lord, to be with us every step of the way. Guide us in the right way and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen.