

YEAR OF THE MESSAGE: Moses
Law and Order: Divine Intent
Spies in the Land: The Grasshopper Syndrome
Numbers 13:1-4a, 25-33

Intro: Today we read about that watershed moment in the history of that first generation of free Hebrews. They came out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and stalled at the Promised Land. They were afraid to go in and take it at God's command. For that generation, it was the decisive moment.

The challenges of life loom pretty large sometimes. They certainly did for the 12 men sent into the Land of Promise to check it out. They felt like "grasshoppers" compared to the giants that were there. They felt that they could never win a fight against them. They told the people of Israel not to try to take the land. They brought an "evil report." It is interesting that the Bible uses the term "bad" or "evil" to describe their report. That report was not simply mistaken or misguided—it was morally reprehensible.

Maybe you have felt like a grasshopper when you confronted the giant problems of your life. Maybe you felt like giving up, like it was useless to try. If so, then you have experienced part of what it usually means to be in partnership with God. God is always inviting us to join him in trying things that are way too big for us.

We typically judge ourselves by the opinions we think others hold of us. In this case, 10 spies decided that they looked like grasshoppers to their enemies. We do not know if this impression of theirs was true. I doubt that Joshua and Caleb would have concurred. We do know that the ten spies began to see themselves as grasshoppers.

You experience grasshoppers most often in two primary ways: you collect their squished bodies on your windshield and you pin them to posters to make insect displays. Grasshoppers are edible.

The idea that we are grasshoppers means that we are ugly, messy, small, and easily squished.

I. The Land of Opportunity Is Always Well-Guarded: Numbers 13:28—*The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.*

A. The Land of Canaan is guarded by

1. Long-standing barriers—the city walls
2. Long-standing traditions—the current societies there
3. Long-ruling Kings of the "Ites"—Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites,

Canaanites, Hivites, Amalekites. These are giants that must be overcome if we are to secure our future.

B. The City of New Orleans is our land of Opportunity. Much of it lies in ruins now, but for those with eyes to see this is an amazing, unparalleled opportunity for making history through the rebirth of a major American city.

But this Land of Opportunity is well-guarded by long-standing barriers like corruption, long-standing traditions like decadence and excess, and long-ruling kings like Bacchus, the god of wine; Aphrodite, the goddess of sex; and Orpheus, the god of music.

C. Your church stands upon the threshold of a new day as well. In fact, the church of Jesus Christ is going to be wonderfully productive and effective in the years ahead. But it will take a faith perspective to recognize the potential and take on the challenges.

D. Your life is so full of opportunities. The sky is the limit for you in so many ways. You must see this planet as full of potential and waiting for your management and engagement.

II. The Potential Gains and Losses Are Always Huge — Numbers 13:23—*They cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it...*

A. Land of Promise was a land “flowing with milk and honey.” The fertile pasturelands and

1. Going forward to battle these fierce foes means some will die, but it also means gaining a new, fertile homeland for this wandering slave people. It means a new beginning and a happy culmination to 400 years of exile in Egypt.

2. Throwing it into reverse meant avoiding the fight now but condemning themselves to a lifetime of wandering in the wilderness. It meant that entire generation would become the world’s best illustration of cowardice and fear in the moment of opportunity.

a. They are used as the premier example of unbelief in 1 Corinthians 10:5 where Paul declares that “God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.” Paul then says that “these things happened to them as examples and were written down as a warning for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

b. The writer of Hebrews (3:16-17) says, “Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?”

And then the summary: “So we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief” (Hebrews 3:19).

B. The stakes are huge for us in our day as well. If we are willing to choose the life of faith, willing to “spy out the land” through the lens of faith, then we have before us all the promises of God to claim, all the inheritance that Jesus purchased for us on the cross.

But if we are unwilling to trust God and choose instead the life of fear and doubt, then we ourselves will experience our own desert, our own wilderness wandering, and a life that never reaches its intended potential.

C. This event in Israel’s history happened so that we would look, understand, and respond in faith to our own circumstances.

III. The Window of Opportunity Is Always Short — Numbers 14:1—*That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.*

A. Windows are narrow almost by definition. The people of Israel have this single opportunity to go in and take the land. They do not realize it, but a refusal

now cannot be reconsidered. They will surely live with that decision for the rest of their lives.

B. You never know for sure when the window will close or why

1. God closed the window on the Hebrews. When they tried to force that window open, they died.

2. God is the one who opens and no man closes, and closes and no man opens.

C. You have only a certain time to go through that window yourself. You are not immortal. Your energies will not last forever.

***Writing my book and how the ticking clock is my enemy, not my friend, in this enterprise.

D. You are forced to make a decision, not because you want to, but because the window is closing. Indecision is its own decision.

IV. The Word of Faith Is Always Required—13:30—*We can certainly do it,* Caleb told the people.

A. Silence the doom and gloom and hysteria. *Caleb silenced the people.*

B. Speak the Word of Faith: *We should go up and take possession of the land.*

C. Express the Divine Possibilities—*we can certainly do it*

***Two games into this football season, the New York Giants were 0-2 and had given up 80 points. They were looking like grasshoppers, not giants. David Tyree, who made the amazing catch that turned the football world upside-down, decided at that 0-2 point in the season that he was going to turn to God, give everyone his testimony, and make sure that God received the glory for any good thing that happened to the NY Giants. He kept that pledge and helped lead his team to one of the most unlikely Superbowl championships in history.

Conclusion: Responding to God today may mean confessing all doubt and unbelief and receiving God's new vision for your future. It may mean asking God to reveal his point of view on your circumstances. For sure, we must respond by asking God for faith. And then we must put to use the faith that God has already planted in our hearts. We must trust him even when we cannot see the end result. We must look through the lens of faith at our world and our particular situation.

Jesus had a question, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Maybe that is the question Jesus has for your heart today.