

We have been reading through the story of Joshua over the past several weeks. Joshua as we have been learning was the person who was commissioned by God to lead God's people into the Promised Land after Moses led the people to the Promised Land.

Moses was only permitted to lead the people to the edge of the land where he was able to view the land before his death. Just before his death, Moses laid his hands on Joshua and gave him the blessing from God for Joshua to carry through on the next step of entering the land that God had promised to God's people.

We are going to do something unusual in worship today in that we are going to read a portion of the text that we read last week. The text we are going to be reading is the story of the spies that Joshua sends into the Promised Land to determine the lay of the land.

Last week we focused on these two spies entering the house of Rahab the prostitute and how God used this unlikely character Rahab to protect the spies. Her protection of these spies allows them to do some investigation of the Promised Land to determine if the land is indeed what they have been looking for. Is this land ripe for God's people to enter in and conquer as God had promised to their ancestors?

I want to invite us to spend some more time looking at these spies because these two spies are not the first spies that were sent into the Promised Land. What we are going to do this morning is to compare these two sets of spies and their views of the Promised Land.

The reason I am going to compare these two sets of spies is because I think these spies represent the different ways we can view the challenges and opportunities that we are facing in our own lives. I also think that these two sets of spies provide two different ways to view the challenges and opportunities we face as a church community.

Before I read the text, I invite you to think about the toughest challenge and opportunity that you are facing in your life right now. What is the biggest and toughest challenge and opportunity facing you individually right now? What is the biggest and toughest challenge and opportunity facing your family right now? And what is the biggest and toughest challenge and opportunity facing our congregation right now?

Let's turn to these stories of the spies who were sent into the Promised Land to check it out. The first reading is going to come from Joshua 2:22-24. The two spies have been protected by Rahab the prostitute and now it is time for them to report back to Joshua about what they have witnessed in the Promised Land. Let us hear their report of what they see.

Read Joshua 2:22-24

So these two spies enter into the Promised Land and report that it is no problem. They report that the Lord has given the Israelites everything that they need and that the people living in the Promised Land pose no threat. These two spies report back to Joshua that the inhabitants of the Promised Land, the Canaanites, melt in fear to God's people.

But this is not the first time that spies are sent into the Promised Land. Some 40 years prior to this story, Moses sent 12 spies into this same area to spy out the land. After checking out the land, let us listen to their report.

Read Numbers 13:25-28

So the first time that spies are sent into the Promised Land, the spies return with a report about how strong and fierce the people are. 10 of the 12 spies report that the people living in the Promised Land are too strong and fierce for them. They say that these people are giants who have descended from the Nephilim.

There is a side note to this story that the people were giants. There is a picture floating around the internet these days that shows archeologists standing next to dug up bones of these so called giants. The bones of these extra large humans are described as descendants of the Nephilim. This picture circulating on the internet of the bones of these extra large people is a fake. This picture is doctored to make it look like an extremely large human body.

But in the real story, 10 of the 12 spies return from the Promised Land and report that the people are giants. These 10 spies report that the challenge before them is too large and overwhelming. But not all of the spies see it that way. Two of these original 12 spies report something different.

Read Numbers 13:30-33

When the people hear the report of the 10 spies about how the people are giants, the people of God become very scared. They start to complain against Moses and his brother Aaron. They say that Moses should have left them alone and they were better off as slaves living under Pharaoh in Egypt. They complain to one another that God had brought them to this place to let them die at the hands of these giants.

But two spies saw something different. These two spies were named Caleb and Joshua. The same Joshua that ends up leading the people into the Promised Land.

Read Numbers 14:5-10

We have just read 2 different reports of the same land. We have heard reports from some spies that the people living there are giants and too strong. We have heard reports from some spies that God is in control and that God will give them what they need to be successful.

So the question before us today is this. As you face your own personal challenges, which type of spy are you listening to? Are you listening to the spy inside of you that says the challenges before you are too great and that God cannot do everything and defeat anything? Are you listening to the spy within you that is telling you that you are weak? Is this the spy that you are listening to?

Or are you listening to the spy inside of you that is saying that God has given you everything that you need and God is going to see you through the challenge that is before you? The voice inside of you that says trust and follow.

That question is also before us as a congregation. There are two voices inside of us that we can choose to follow as a congregation. We can listen to the voice inside of us that says that the challenges in front of us as a congregation are too big for our measly resources. There is the voice inside of us that says that God is not strong enough to use this body of believers to meet and overcome the challenges before us as a congregation.

There is the voice inside of us that is depending on fear of tomorrow. Is that the voice that we listen to? The voice of fear?

Or do we listen to the spy that says that God has got this. Do we listen to the spy that says that nothing is too big for God to overcome? Do we listen to the voice inside of us that tells us that the challenges before us are not really all that big?

Interesting development happens in this story of God's people entering the Promised Land. The two spies that said that the people in the Promised Land were not to be feared were named Caleb and Joshua. Because Caleb and Joshua reported back to Moses that God would equip them to overcome any challenges, Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies that were allowed to enter the Promised Land. The spies that fearfully reported about how intimidating the adversaries were ended up dying.

But even though Joshua and Caleb report that the challenges before them are not too great to overcome, Moses says to the people that it is not yet time to enter the Promised Land. Moses hears the reports from Joshua and Caleb but then says it is not yet time to enter. Moses then leads the people on a wilderness journey that takes them 40 years before they return. Moses believes that in this wilderness journey they will discover a deeper relationship with God.

And why is that? Why can't they enter the Promised Land at this point? Even though the people complained bitterly against Moses, Moses believed that it was better to wait and work in God's time rather than try to move quickly ahead of God's time. In fact, there was one group of people who tried to invade the Promised Land but they failed because they did not wait on God to guide them.

You may be facing a big and daunting challenge in your personal life right now. Your family may be facing a big and daunting challenge in your life right now. You may feel as though this congregation is facing a big and daunting challenge right now.

As you face and as we face challenges, I ask you this. Which voice are you listening to? The voice that uses your own fear to say that God is weak and that the challenge is giant? Or are you listening to the voice that is telling you that God is strong and the challenge is nothing that God cannot overcome through you.

Both to these spies are giving reports to you.

Which spy are you going to listen to?

I know which spy I am choosing to listen to.

I'm going to go with Joshua.

I choose to listen to the voices that tell us what God is able to accomplish rather than the voices that tell us what God cannot accomplish.

Because I believe that God has given you and me everything that we need if we take our time, if we listen, and if we follow. AMEN.

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-Given: November 16, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)