

**2020: The Global Year of the Bible**  
**A Lamp and a Light, Part 7**  
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I am so grateful to Laurie and to Karl for their preaching in these last two weeks. It takes a lot of time and prayer to read through all that we are reading together in the Bible each week, and then discerning in prayer what is calling out for our attention each Sabbath day when we gather. So, on behalf of all of us, thank you to Laurie and to Karl.

Let's pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for your unchanging Word. Thank you for the beauty, truth, and goodness we see there. Thank you for showing us how to follow you, and thank you, through Jesus Christ, for making the way so clear and accessible. Teach us now, by your Holy Spirit. Bring us to a new place of understanding and faith. We open our hearts to you now. We also pray in these moments for our children and our grandchildren and our great grandchildren. We pray for all of them to have a life-giving relationship with you through Jesus. We pray that our lives would be clear evidence of how you change us and put our feet on a place of peace and hope and love. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

I'm going to remind us of some of the situations we find the Israelites in starting in Numbers 12. There is a unifying theme that runs through them all.

Let's first remember that the Israelites (over 2 million people) have been rescued by God from over 400 years of slavery to the Egyptians. They have crossed the Red Sea by God's miraculous hand who parted the waters for them. They travelled to Mt. Sinai where God gave them the 10 Commandments, they have been instructed down to the smallest detail how to build a portable place of worship and sacrifice called the Tabernacle, and they have complained and grumbled all along the way. They have whined, "Why didn't you just leave us in Egypt instead of killing us out here in the desert?" even though God provided water for them, God provided daily food for them, God provided protection over them, God provided for all their needs. But it was never fast enough, tasty enough, or just never enough. After all God had done in saving them and sparing their lives, they weren't happy. Dear Moses. What patience he exhibited! What restraint he exercised! Right?

So the trip from Egypt to Canaan is only about 250 miles. And yet, this troupe of several million Israelites wandered around for 40 years! 40 years of not getting where they were going because they didn't have the faith to trust God to get them there his way.

In Numbers 13:26-33, Moses sent one leader from each of the twelve tribes into the land of Canaan to check it out. They were gone for 40 days. When they came back, here is what transpired, *"<sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup>The Amalekites 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." <sup>30</sup>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." <sup>31</sup>But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."*

But two of the twelve leaders who went, Joshua & Caleb, did not agree. After a night of grumbling and complaining was heard from one end of the camp to the other, here's what happened, *"<sup>5</sup>Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. <sup>6</sup>Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes <sup>7</sup>and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly*

good. *“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. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”*

But the people were afraid. They trusted the 10 who gave a report based on fear instead of trusting the 2 who gave a report based on faith – and the end result was 40 years of God seeking to teach them that he could be trusted. Forty years of God giving them more rules and regulations as to how to approach him and not approach him, for he is holy and they / we are not. Forty years of consequences (1 year for every day the spies were in the land of Canaan) when the people did not obey. Forty years of some serious on-the-job training to be God’s people, to be God’s distinct, set-apart people. And what was and still is the most looming threat to that? Idolatry. Idolatry. Which is what? Putting anyone or anything in the place that God alone deserves to be. Putting anyone or anything in the place of God. Putting your fear in place of God’s promises – that’s idolatry. Putting your own will in place of God’s will – that’s idolatry. Choosing to believe that going against what the Bible says to do is okay, that’s idolatry – making an idol of yourself or your own decisions. Abortion is a form of idolatry. It takes the life of a baby and causes great physical, emotional, mental, & spiritual upheaval in the life of the mother and the father. It puts what humans choose over what God says about every single life from conception to eternity. Being sexually active outside of marriage is a form of idolatry. It puts your desires in place of God’s instructions. Bullying people is idolatry. It puts you up on some self-made throne in order to pass judgment on another person. We may think we are free when we do that, but we are not. We are being used and enslaved by the evil forces to bring more and more darkness into our own hearts. Not being able to put your phone down, even and especially in a time of worship, whew! That’s idolatry, friends. Parents, please don’t let your kids keep sliding down that very slippery slope. Choosing not to forgive is a form of idolatry – putting our anger and bitterness and hurt on display in our lives instead of putting our faith and hope in God on display for the world to see. I could go on and on and on and on...

Let’s look at some beautiful words from Deuteronomy 4 to help us see and understand. Moses is speaking to the nation of Israel. They are on the verge of crossing the Jordan River and finally, finally going into the land he had promised to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses said, *“But be very careful! You did not see the Lord’s form on the day he spoke to you from the heart of the fire at Mount Sinai. So do not corrupt yourselves by making an idol in any form – whether of a man or a woman, an animal on the ground, a bird in the sky, a small animal that scurries along the ground, or a fish in the deepest sea. And when you look up into the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars – all the forces of heaven – don’t be seduced into worshiping them. The Lord your God gave them to all the peoples of the earth. Remember that the Lord rescued you from the iron-smelting furnace of Egypt in order to make you his very own people and his special possession, which is what you are today. But the Lord was angry with me because of you. He vowed that I would not cross the Jordan River into the good land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession. You will cross the Jordan to occupy the land, but I will not. Instead, I will die here on the east side of the river. So be careful not to break the covenant the Lord your God has made with you. Do not make idols of any shape or form, for the Lord your God has forbidden this. The Lord your God is a devouring fire; he is a jealous God. In the future, when you have children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time, do not corrupt yourselves by making idols of any kind. This is evil in the sight of the Lord your God and will arouse his anger. Today I call on heaven and earth as witnesses against you. If you break my covenant, you will quickly disappear from the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. You will live there only a short time; then you will be utterly destroyed. For the Lord will scatter you among the nations, where only a few of you will survive. There, in a foreign land, you will worship idols made from wood and stone – gods that neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will search again for the Lord your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him. In the distant future, when you are suffering all these things, you will finally return to the Lord your God and listen to what he tells you. For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors. Now search all of history, from the time God created people on the earth until now, and search from one end of the*

heavens to the other. Has anything as great as this ever been seen or heard before? <sup>33</sup>Has any nation ever heard the voice of God speaking from fire—as you did—and survived? <sup>34</sup>Has any other god dared to take a nation for himself out of another nation by means of trials, miraculous signs, wonders, war, a strong hand, a powerful arm, and terrifying acts? Yet that is what the Lord your God did for you in Egypt, right before your eyes. <sup>35</sup>“He showed you these things so you would know that the Lord is God and there is no other. <sup>36</sup>He let you hear his voice from heaven so he could instruct you. He let you see his great fire here on earth so he could speak to you from it. <sup>37</sup>Because he loved your ancestors, he chose to bless their descendants, and he personally brought you out of Egypt with a great display of power. <sup>38</sup>He drove out nations far greater than you, so he could bring you in and give you their land as your special possession, as it is today. <sup>39</sup>“So remember this and keep it firmly in mind: The Lord is God both in heaven and on earth, and there is no other. <sup>40</sup>If you obey all the decrees and commands I am giving you today, all will be well with you and your children. I am giving you these instructions so you will enjoy a long life in the land the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”

We get a sense of God’s love for the people, God’s hope for their holiness, God’s mercy, and God’s disgust for idolatry, don’t we? God is big-time serious about what or who is first in our lives. Because when He is not first then it’s a real easy slide for Him to become last. Our lives of faith need to be just that – lives of faith. Faith! Like Joshua and Caleb, we need to trust God’s promises instead of our circumstances. Faith is stepping out into the Red Sea and trusting its not going to let go and overwhelm us. To believe otherwise is idolatry. Putting our fear, our uncertainty, our inadequacies, and our feelings of being overwhelmed in place of God is idolatry.

You all know I do not like to fly. But years ago I determined that I would not let my fear overwhelm my faith. I decided that if God was calling me to go somewhere, if I had to fly, I would fly. And so I do. Do I like it? Not really. But it sure is a lot faster and the sights of the clouds and the sunsets over the clouds are pretty awesome.

The road of faith is narrow. It’s narrow. Just think how narrow it was for the Israelites as you read in these next weeks of all the laws and regulations. Regulations upon regulations. The editor of the Bible many of us are using writes this as part of his commentary (p. 226), “Moses reminds the people of the law’s twofold purpose: to bring them into a proper relationship with God, and to regulate their conduct toward orderly and beneficial living.” God sought to make clear the way of faith by setting firm boundaries on just about every area of their lives. In some ways, I feel like they would have been half-afraid to take a step in the wrong direction so as not to lose their lives. But he was teaching them to have a proper fear of him. It was intense. And for the Levites – the tribe of the holy priesthood – whew. One inch too far to the left or the right – and you were gone!

This was all so important because of the passing on of the faith to the next generation. It was always God’s will for us to be fruitful and multiply. If they could just keep themselves pure, keep themselves from putting anything up as an idol in place of God, then they could responsibly pass on their faith to their children and grandchildren. Be fruitful and multiply God-fearing people! To the Israelites, the premier commandment comes in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup>And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. <sup>6</sup>And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. <sup>7</sup>Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

In other words, “Don’t make your relationship with the LORD just a Sunday thing. It’s not meant to be a Sunday thing. It has never meant to be just a one-day thing.” Our life of faith in a holy, wrathful yet merciful God is meant to be all-consuming. If it is not, if our faith is merely something in parenthesis at the end of our day, like an ‘after-thought,’ or if our faith is only words and our lives haven’t changed one bit, we are missing it. We are missing the fulfillment of the promises of God in our lives not because his promises are not true, but because we put ourselves and our *perceived lack* in place of his abundant provision.

Our lives are messy. My life is messy. Your life is messy. But I don't mean it is a mess. Maybe it is, but that's not what I mean. To say my house is messy, to me, means there are piles in places I don't want piles. I like my house to be free of piles. I like order. Order calms me. (You wouldn't think that if you walk into my office, but I can't ever seem to get ahead in there...). So for me to say my house is messy is different than saying my house is a mess. That seems bigger. It seems more inclusive – like every room is a disaster.

My life is messy. But my life as a whole is not a mess, because I know and trust the One who brings order out of chaos. My life is messy but my life is not a mess because Jesus came for me. He came for you. He came, not to get rid of all the laws God laid down for his people, but to fulfill them. Matthew 5:17-25, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* Let me read it again from The Message (a paraphrase of Scripture by Eugene Peterson), *17-18 “Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working. 19-20 “Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom.”*

Jesus steps into the mess, the total, sinful mess of our lives before we put our faith in him and covers us in his purity. His perfect relationship with the Father opens the way for our relationship with the Heavenly Father. His blood poured out takes the place of the blood from all those sacrifices to pay the penalty for our sin. He steps into our sinsick, hopeless mess and brings us order, brings us peace, and brings us hope. That's salvation, folks. That's the gift of salvation that we all need. We ALL need in order to get freed from the slavery to idolatry we all were born with. But then, even after the main mess was erased, the whole house was deep-cleaned, we still have messes. Just because we are now freed and saved doesn't mean we don't still have messiness. We still find ourselves lost and wandering in the wilderness. We still find ourselves run by fear instead of faith. We still find ourselves falling into the trap of believing we know better than God. And Jesus is still there. He is still there. He is still with you. He is still with me. He is still trusting us to tell the next generation about him by our words and our deeds. Even in our messiness, he trusts us with his message.

I want us to listen to a song just released last year by CityAlight – the same group who wrote Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me. It is called Jesus, Strong and Kind. Wherever you are, whatever messiness you're in right now, may the simple message minister to your heart and bring you peace.

Jesus said that if I thirst I should come to Him. No one else can satisfy, I should come to Him.  
Jesus said, if I am weak I should come to Him. No one else can be my strength, I should come to Him.

For the Lord is good and faithful. He will keep us day and night.

We can always run to Jesus. Jesus, strong and kind.

Jesus said that if I fear I should come to Him. No one else can be my shield, I should come to Him.

For the Lord is good and faithful, He will keep us day and night.

We can always run to Jesus. Jesus, strong and kind.

Jesus said, if I am lost He will come to me. And He showed me on that cross, He will come to me.

For the Lord is good and faithful, He will keep us day and night

We can always run to Jesus, Jesus, strong and kind.

*Let us pray: Father God, when we find ourselves wandering, overwhelmed, not sure of which way to go, remind us. May it be You we run to when we rise and when we lie down. May it be You we think about as we go in and out our doors. May it be You we see in the seat beside us at the doctor's office. May it be You we seek when our hearts are sad. Help us evermore to trust you and to love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*