

Innocent Looking but Evil

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon warns against the dangers of unbelief and rebellion against God, using the story of the Israelites in the wilderness as an example.

Duration: 26:11

Scripture: Exodus 2:23-25, Psalm 95:7-11, Hebrews 3:7-8, Hebrews 3:15-19, Hebrews 4:3, Hebrews 4:7, Hebrews 4:11

Topics: "Evil"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor discusses the story of Moses sending out spies to explore the land of Canaan. The spies were instructed to assess the strength of the people living there, the condition of the land, and bring back samples of the crops. After 40 days, the spies returned and reported to Moses and the Israelite community. However, instead of being grateful for the information, the people reacted with fear and frustration, even wanting to stone Joshua and Caleb for their report. The pastor emphasizes the importance of understanding the context and the tendency of people to reject messages they don't want to hear.

Transcript

There is a critical story in the Old Testament, which is so critical and so meaningful to us, although we live thousands of years later. You have to know about this. I would be a bad pastor if I didn't remind you of this one critical story.

When God looked down and heard the cry of his people in Egypt, they were in slavery for 400 years, he raised up Moses to go and deliver them. You know that part. Moses confronted Pharaoh and God took them out.

The promise that God had given hundreds of years before that to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is that your posterity, your children's children's children are going to live, your descendants are going to live in this land. But it looked terrible because they were slaves in Egypt. But now God was going to fulfill his promise.

And activated by prayer, he sends Moses and he brings the people out of Egypt. They come out of Egypt and they move to the Sinai Peninsula, and that's northeast. And they travel there.

We don't know how many, but at least hundreds of thousands. No one's sure the exact number, but it seems like hundreds of thousands, maybe almost a million people, maybe more. And they go to Mount Sinai and they're moving and they're settling down a certain time.

They're following the cloud and the pillar of fire, pillar of cloud. And they get to Mount Sinai, also called Mount Horeb in the Bible. And they go there and there is where Moses goes up to the mountain and he receives many commandments from God, mainly the 10 commandments written on stone.

And then many, many hundreds of precepts and regulations that he is to teach the people. All of those. And those Jewish people would obey all of those.

Eating, dietary, things about marriage, divorce, the whole thing. So the Bible tells us that they were there and then while Moses was up in the mountain, they could not wait. That's the nature of us.

We can't wait on God. And if God's not doing what we want on our timetable, we got to do something. And they got this genius idea of going to Aaron and asking him to build a golden calf.

And they worshipped that because they wanted something visible. See, to most people, worshipping God in spirit and in truth and invisibly like we were tonight, we don't see him, we can't touch him or feel him, but we know he's real. Amen? And our spirits can perceive his Holy Spirit and be affected by him, the Spirit.

But the people, they had to see something. Just like hundreds of years later, they wanted a king. We got to have something like the other nations.

You got to see things. So they built that calf. Moses came down.

You know about that. And then they headed, by God's mercy, they headed north to go into the promised land. And a few months later, maybe four to six months after they had left Egypt, they are up in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.

And they are in a place called Kadesh Barnea, and they are ready to roll. Pastor, that can't be because I read in the Bible that they were in the desert for 40 years. Oh, but you don't know how that happened.

It's maybe one of the more meaningful stories in the whole Old Testament for us. Let's speed read it. Just follow me, okay? The Lord now said to Moses, send out men.

They're in Kadesh Barnea, right on the tip, on the cusp, on the border of the promised land. Send out men to explore the land of Canaan, the land I am giving to the Israelites. Send one leader from each of the 12 ancestral tribes.

So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He sent out 12 men, all tribal leaders of Israel, from their camp in the wilderness of Paran. Then jumping down to verse 17, Moses gave the men these instructions as he sent them out to explore the land.

Go north through the Negev into the hill country. See what the land is like, and find out whether the people living there are strong or weak, few or many. See what kind of land they live in.

Is it good or bad? Do their towns have walls, or are they unprotected like open camps? Is the soil fertile or poor? Are there many trees? Do your best to bring back samples of the crops you see. It happened to be the season for harvesting the first ripe grapes. After exploring the land for 40 days, I'm skipping here as

you see, the men returned to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran.

They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land. This was their report to Moses. Here's the report.

We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a beautiful, bountiful country. A land flowing with milk and honey. That means there was enough pasture that they could raise cattle, which would produce milk, and honey means there were flowers and all of that, that bees would be active there.

It wasn't barren and dry and a hopeless land. It was beautiful. Here is the kind of fruit it produces.

Ah, but the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites live in the hill country.

The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley. But Caleb, one of the 12 spies, but Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. Let's go at once to take the land, he said.

We can certainly conquer it. But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. Ten against Caleb and Joshua, who was the other spy who agreed with Caleb.

They disagreed. We can't go up against them. They are stronger than we are.

So they spread this bad, most translations have evil. This was an evil report to God, in God's sight. This was very evil.

Tonight I'm talking about something that looks innocent, but is very evil. There are things in life that look innocent. We get used to them.

But to God, they're very evil. They spread this evil report about the land among the Israelites. The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there.

All the people we saw were huge. Now everybody's big. Before it was just the descendants of Anak.

Now everybody's big. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers.

And that's what they thought too. Then the whole community began weeping aloud and they cried all night. Just take that sentence.

Then the whole community began weeping aloud and they cried all night. You know, sometimes in certain contexts that would be a beautiful testimony. You know, God is working with people and out of their love for him, they begin to just weep for joy.

And all night long they continue in just thanking God. Like David says, in the night I wet my pillow with tears just thinking about your goodness. But in this context, weeping and moaning is something that is going to trigger a reaction from God you will not believe.

They cried all night. Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron now, because of the people's frustration, they're attacking leadership because they're frustrated themselves.

This is unfortunately what leaders have to deal with. When people have no faith and are frustrated and get filled with fear, instead of facing themselves, they criticize the person they think got them in the mess. In this case, Moses and Aaron.

They talked against Moses and Aaron. And now they're talking, if only we had died in Egypt. Imagine, God sent Moses and delivered them out of slavery.

Now they want to go back. That's why this is so evil. Or even here in the wilderness, they complain.

Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder. Would it be better for us to return to Egypt? Then they plotted among themselves. Now they got the whole people.

You see, unbelief and people like those 10 spies, they have an effect on other people. A little leaven leavens the whole loaf. Now they got everybody defeated and discouraged.

Let's choose a new leader and go back to Egypt. Oh my goodness. If I was Moses, I would have taken out an Uzi and just started firing everywhere.

Then Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground before the whole community of Israel. Two of the men who had explored the land, Joshua son of Nun, Caleb son of Jephunneh, tore their clothing. They said to all the people of Israel, the land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land.

And if the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey. Do not rebel against the Lord and don't be afraid of the people of the land.

They are only helpless prey to us. They're nothing. This is a piece of cake for us.

Let's just do it. And the others say, we're all gonna die. Isn't that amazing? The difference between faith and unbelief, panic attacks and depression.

And then the other people are like, come on, let's get this on. God is with us. He promised us the land.

Would he lie? He got us out of Egypt so that we would die. Come on. They have no protection.

But the Lord is with us. Don't be afraid of them. But the whole community began to talk about stone.

Oh, now they want to kill Joshua and Caleb. This is beautiful. This these are the people of God.

These are the covenant people of God. Whenever you hear people just emphasize covenant, covenant, covenant, always remember what's happening on the ground. You better find out, too.

These were people, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were delivered out of Egypt and they want a stone to spies who tell them what they don't want to hear. That's how we can get petulant and babyish when we don't hear what we want to hear.

We want to shoot the messenger. We don't like the message. Like I was sharing with the pastors today, this man who's affected my life somewhat, his writings.

He said this interesting things talking about how fickle people are and how they don't want to submit to God. He said a lot of people want God to repent. Not them.

They want God to change. No, God, you change. I don't like what I'm reading.

Change. God, would you please change this? This is very hard on me. Please repent, God, of your ways.

That's what they're doing now. Then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to all the Israelites at the tabernacle. And the Lord said to Moses, how long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they never believe me even after all the miraculous signs they have done among them? I will disown them and destroy them with a plague.

Then I will make you, Moses, into a nation greater and mightier than they are. And then I'm not reading anymore. Then what follows, sorry for the long reading, but it's a good story for us, isn't it? And then Moses intercedes for the people who don't want him, who have heard him and insulted him.

What a heart Moses had. What kind of man of God was Moses? He said, God, no, don't kill him. The people will say God brought him out of Egypt, but he couldn't bring them in.

That's why he killed them all. No, God, your glory will be affected. Read it.

He has a prayer there that is really lays a hold of God and says to God, don't do it. Don't do it. And he could have said, yeah, I don't like them either.

Wipe them all out and raise the people after me and call them Mosesites instead of Israelites. Right, but no, but no. And then what, just so you know, the end of the story, God says, okay, but they spied out the land for 40 days.

For every day they spied out the land, came back with that evil report. They're going to wander for one day per year, one year per every day, 40 years. They're going to wander.

They won't go in the land. And you know, the whole adult population over 20 years old that listened to those 10 spies. And they said, we'll never get in that land.

I heard what they said. So I agree. They'll never go in that land.

They'll never see the promised land because that's how they've offended me and hurt me. But the children that they said would die, these children won't die. I'm going to wait 40 years for them all to die off.

They're all going to die. And they're going to lay in the sand out here, their corpses and the children they worried about. I'm bringing all those children into the promised land.

And that's how it happened. All those years later, when Joshua brought them in, the whole generation that came out of Egypt, none of the adults went in because of unbelief. But all the younger ones that they were worried about, the two-year-olds and one-year-olds and all of that, they went in.

Now, just in case, as I close here, you think that this has nothing really to do with us. Well, listen, now go thousands of years later to the New Testament book of Hebrews. That is why the Holy Spirit says today

when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness.

There your ancestors tested and tried my patience even though they saw my miracles for 40 years. So I was angry with them and I said, their hearts always turn away from me. They refused to do what I tell them.

So in my anger, I took an oath. They will never enter my place of rest. Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters at the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. Notice what unbelief does. It turns us away from the living God.

God is living, wants to do so much, but unbelief turns us away from God and we miss out on all that he had planned for our lives. Nobody could say, well, no, God planned that all along. I don't read it that way.

God promised that they would go into the promised land. But he said, if you're not going to believe and rebel against me, then you won't go in the promised land. I'm not going to force you into something you won't trust me for.

You must warn each other every day, which is what Pastor Simba was trying to do tonight while it is still today, so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. Remember what it says.

Today, when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled. And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt? And who made God angry for 40 years? Wasn't it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they should never enter his rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed him? So we see that because of their unbelief, they were not able to enter his rest. So all I want to say to you, because I read a lot of verses, but the reading of scripture is something I'm supposed to do to you.

Paul says to Timothy, a minister, give yourself to reading of the scripture. That's not just private, it's public to you. I want to do it more and be a better pastor to you.

On the cusp of all that God had promised, they blew everything. Right on the edge, they affected their own family, made them wander for 40 years. They themselves lost out, never went into the promised land.

Right on the edge. And what people lost out? The ones who saw God open the Red Sea. See, unbelief is incredible.

Unbelief cannot be explained. How could you see the Red Sea open? How could you see manna come down every single morning and feed you? How could you see quail come in like a million and just flopping on the ground so you could eat them? How could God do all of that in you? And now later, when he says, enter in, you can't believe him? The God who did all of that when you were slaves, he can't help you now? Think what unbelief is to all of us. How easy it is for us not to believe.

And notice how it crushed God's heart. How it grieved him. You gave an evil report.

You said that the land was good like I told you it would be good. But who gives you the right to say, I wouldn't bring you in? That's an evil thing. You evil, unbelieving person.

See, we're in a victim culture, victim mentality. Oh, she has no faith. Well, she better have faith.

Because without faith, it's impossible to please God. Faith is something we choose not to have. We're not incapable of having faith.

Just read God's word and get in his presence and he'll put faith in you. They would not go by what God had promised. They would not go by what they had seen.

And they were like a lot of believers possibly today. They come out of Egypt, but they never go into what God promised for them. Listen, they come out of the old life, but they never get into the place of blessing, of ministry, of usefulness, of representing God in a powerful way, more than a conqueror.

They live, make the carpet the 40 years. They live out of Egypt. They're not what they used to do, not smoking dope anymore.

They're out of that and all of that. But where God wants them to go, they never make it. They're wandering around.

Churches can be like that. Pastors can be like that. Just wandering around because of unbelief.

But no, I'm showing you an open door. Go through it. No, we will never get the money for it.

It's too hard. No, I can't open my house for this REACH festival. It's all hyped up about REACH.

I can't open my house. The house doesn't look right. People might not look, you know, it might work out.

I don't want to bother my relatives and families. And God says, no, I'll be with you. I'll never leave you.

I'll never forsake you. I will be with you. And when you open your mouth, I'll put words in it.

And I'll help you and I'll bless you and I'll make you a blessing. And I'll do all that. No, I don't want.

I don't know. So there's people there half the time they want to go back to Egypt. That's why they love the things of this world.

They study. They know everything about the things in the world. The music, the movies, Captain Marvel, Captain whoever.

And they know everything about all of that. But the things of God, no, they don't know that they're wandering in between two worlds. Am I right or wrong? Oh, I am absolutely right.

I know from my own life and counseling a few people in my day. Now, this promised land is not a type of heaven. It's not heaven.

If you have to fight enemies to possess the land, all those battle of Jericho, obviously that's not heaven. In heaven, how many are happy? We don't have to fight anybody. So although we do that, especially it developed in what's called Negro spirituals, which are so beautiful and poignant.

I'm crossing Jordan and go into the promised land. You know that my mom crossed over and went into the promised land, but they had to fight battles in the promised land. So Canaan is not a perfect picture of heaven because we don't have to pull down walls and fight people.

No. What the promised land is the purpose of God for your life. Sir, ma'am, up in the balcony, do you realize that God has a purpose for you? Do you realize he can make you into something you can't even imagine? That's what he can do.

When he looked at Peter, who was so weak, he said, ah, you know, is, uh, you know, your name is Simon, but I'm going to make you Peter. You're going to be a rock. And that was the last thing he could be.

But God said, I won't do that for you. But will you trust me? Some of us come up and we face battles and there are enemies and there's walls and there's difficulties. So what if we're in God's will and he permitted that to confront us? Isn't he going to help us see the walls come down? Come on, let's put our hands together.

When something is in front of us, God permitted it to be in front of us. And he was testing the people. And they, instead of stepping out in faith, they got afraid.

I'd like God to shake the fear out of all of us today. Do not fear. How many times did he say that? Fear not, I am with you.

But unbelief, it's an evil thing. In my own life, it's been evil thing. Held me back.

I want to have faith. I want to have more faith. I want to step out.

Yeah, but how do you know it'll work out? It'll work out. God is with you. What do you have to worry about? God is saying to us, did I bring you out of Egypt? And after, look, how many, we're not talking about Red Sea and all of that, but in your own life, how many have seen God do amazing things in your life? Wave your hand, please, at me.

Please, way up in the balcony, wave them at me. Okay. After we've seen all of that, are we going to have an evil heart of unbelief? Notice what it's called, an evil heart.

That's an evil thing to call God a liar. That's an evil thing for me not to believe that what God said he will do. That's not a weakness in me.

It's not a weakness and, you know, whatever. No, it's I choose not to believe God, and God took that serious. I don't want that for any of us.

I want to see us all go into the full purpose of God for our lives. I'm thinking about pastors that I talk to by the thousands every year, going out and doing these pastors events here and over the countries, and that's where the battle is always. For all of us, will you believe? I can't preach that.

The people might walk out. I know, but it's in my word. Preach it.

I'll be with you. No, they might leave and take their tithes, and I say to them, no, don't laugh. That's not something to laugh about.

That's the little tiptoeing that pastors and leaders do all the time. They're thinking numbers and offerings. They're not thinking pleasing God because it takes faith to just live for God and for his approval.

Unbelief says, no, be a politician and make everybody feel comfortable. Always in love when we speak. I'm not talking now about pounding people.

That's not nice. It takes faith. This has been burning in my heart for 10 days.

This is the first day I felt God release me to talk about it, but I've been praying for you. I want to see all of you, the pastors in this church, the deacons, you up in the balcony. I want to see an explosion in your life.

I want to see you confront whatever the devil throws at you and get out of here. Jesus died and rose again, and he loves me, and you're going to come down. Come on.

Can we say amen to that? Amen. Let's close our eyes. I don't even know what to say now.

God knows I don't know what to say now. I just told them I don't know what to say now. I can only say this.

This has such application in our lives in so many ways. On the cusp, you could be right on the edge of a breakthrough and seeing an amazing thing in your life, and God says, trust me. Trust me.

Don't try. Don't worry, and don't you believe that false evil report. That's an evil thing, and don't any of us ever spread evil reports to people and pull them down and say, God won't.

God can't. It's too late. Let's speak words of faith to people, the promises of God, but if you're here today and you say, pastor, that was for me in a way you do not know, and you don't have to know, but I want to get out of my seat and end the service here with you because I am like you, pastor.

I want to have more faith. I don't want to lose out on what God has for my life because of unbelief. Just come out of your seat.

Walk right up here to the front. No one else moving. Just come on up.

Maybe God's called you to something, and you know I'm on the cusp of it, but I'm not there yet, but I want it. God knows the desires of my heart, and I know some things he's promised, but I'm not there yet, but I'm going to believe. I'm going to believe.

I'm not going to worry. I'm not going to be afraid. I'm going to believe.

I'm going to believe. God, Lord, I believe. I believe your promise.

I believe your power. I know what you've done in my life. You're going to do it again.

No weapon formed against me will keep me back from doing what God wants me to do. I believe for my children. I believe for my life.

I believe for my finances. I will not live in fear. I will not live in fear.

You haven't given me a spirit of fear. Open your hands and lift them up in a position of receiving. Lord, I receive.

I receive. I lift my hands up to you, God. You know what I need, Lord.

Let's just open our mouths and praise him for all the things we've seen him do in our lives already. Come on, that'll help build our faith. Praise him for what he did 10 years ago, 5 years ago, 5 months ago, 25 years ago, how he saved you and brought you out, how he supplied against all odds.

We praise you. Gracias, Senor. Oh, gracias, Senor.

Gracias, Senor. We praise you. We praise you, Lord.

We praise you. We praise you, Lord. We praise you, Lord.

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