

The Pleasant Land Despised Numbers 13, 14

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining hope and faith in God's promises while avoiding the pitfalls of unbelief and despair.

Scripture: Numbers 13:27

Topics: "Faith", "Hope in God's Promises"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the importance of keeping our hearts focused on the promise of eternal glory and the 'pleasant land' that God has prepared for us. He warns against the tendency to despise this promise by becoming preoccupied with present difficulties, which can lead to unbelief and despair, much like the Israelites who doubted God's goodness despite witnessing the bounty of Canaan. Darby encourages believers to maintain a joyful anticipation of their heavenly inheritance, reminding them that God is not merely a helper in times of trouble but the source of their ultimate joy and strength. He calls for a deep communion with the Holy Spirit to truly appreciate the glory that awaits us, urging the congregation to hold fast to their hope and not to lose sight of the blessings that are theirs in Christ.

Transcript

Beloved, do our hearts indeed say

"We are on our way to God"?

Do we believe that, with the innumerable throng of the redeemed, we shall soon sing the everlasting anthem of praise to the Lamb? It is astonishing the simplicity of heart there is when we believe that "we are on our way to God." Whenever the soul has really got hold of this, believing in God, knowing His love, that He has brought us out of Egypt, and that we are on our way to Canaan, there is a spring of heart that surmounts everything. There may be a great many things by the way to exercise our hearts and thoughts; but if this feeling predominates, they only come in by the way. If my mind be fixed on present circumstances and present difficulties, and on God's helping me in them, there will not at all be the same spring of joy. For then I make God to be simply the servant of my necessities. The heart rests and centres there, and God sinks down into a mere help in time of trouble. It is quite true that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble" (Ps. 46:1); but to bring Him down to be only this changes the whole aspect of things. Himself, as our portion, is infallibly ours. If our hearts are fixed on being with Jesus in His rest and glory, on being in the "Father's house," our own present difficulties have the character of difficulties by the way; we can then rise over trouble, however felt. And our thoughts about

God are not merely that He will help us in the circumstances in which we are - our hearts being fixed on Him, we live in the freedom that arises from the constant certainty that all that is Christ's is ours. It is important for us to have our minds fixed on the hope of glory which is set before us.

One form which unbelief takes is the not having this hope fresh on the mind. Supposing I had to live twenty years, the next thing to my heart ought to be the glory. In the children of Israel unbelief took many forms; one character of it was that "they despised the pleasant land," chap. 14:31; Ps. 106 : 24. Now very often there is in our hearts practically, though not wilfully, the despising of the pleasant land. I am not speaking of any doubtfulness as to the land being ours. If there were something that a friend had given me as a great treasure, and I was sure of its being mine, and yet I looked at it but seldom and cared to think of it but seldom, this would be a proof (not of uncertainty respecting its being mine, but) that I despised the thing, that I had no real value for it. This is very often the way we treat the heavenly glory that belongs to us. We do not question the truth of the promises; but, when our souls are not dwelling upon and delighting in the glory that is set before us, there is a "despising of the pleasant land." It is too much the case with the saints. And no occupation with present things - with present duties even - can make up for the loss of peace and comfort there is to the soul from not dwelling on the things which God has laid up in store for them that love Him (1 Cor. 2:9) as its own things. Instead of God's being the strength and fulness of our present joy in the midst of present tribulation, as it is said, "We joy in God" (Rom. 5:11), we only make Him a help in time of trouble. There is weakness and infirmity instead of rejoicing in God. The heart being brought down here and kept down, it brings down God after it (so gracious is He, that He will even come down), instead of rising above present circumstances up to God.

277 Of course this character of unbelief will not be manifested in the hearts of the saints as it was in the children of Israel, but, in measure, it is the same thing.

The "spies" (Num. 13, 14) had been sent by Moses, at the command of Jehovah, to search out the land of Canaan, "which," Jehovah said, "I give unto the children of Israel," and to bring of the fruit thereof. The Spirit of God, personally dwelling in present witness in us, takes of the glory of the Lord Jesus, of the things of the land of promise (that true Canaan, of which faith says, My land), and thus shews us of our portion.

"So they went up, and searched the land, from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob. . . . And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it," v. 23-27. There was no gainsaying the report of the spies, these grapes told of the goodness of the land. It was a land that produced such fruit. So, when the Holy Ghost brings the earnest to us of our joy and glory, who would gainsay? who does not feel that it is worth anything by the way to get there - the earnest is so sweet?

278 "Nevertheless," said the spies, "the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great, and, moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains," etc. When the people

heard that there were difficulties, there began to be restlessness and uneasiness amongst them.

"And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well, able to overcome it," v. 30. He was strong in faith.

"But the men that went up with him, said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched, unto the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight," v. 31-33. That is, they get hold of the thought of the people in unbelief: and venture to deny all that they had previously said, when they see that their report was not received. The first thing they told Moses was the simple truth, that it was a very good land; but when they see this unbelief at work in the minds of the people, their judgment respecting it is quite different, and they say It is a very bad land. The whole sense of the goodness of Jehovah in giving them the land is gone, and consequently they break down in despair when looking at the difficulties by the way. There is not merely distrust about their overcoming these enemies; they lose the sense of the goodness of the land, and then they have no encouragement in their difficulties. Their state becomes weakness. just so with the Christian; if I lose the joy of the glory, the difficulties I meet with by the way are insurmountable, for my heart does not know what it has to contend for.

279 This and more will be seen coming out in chapter 14. And all the congregation lifted up their voices, and cried, and the people wept that night," etc. When, in the first freshness of their setting out, their sin had manifested itself (bad as it was), they did not lay the blame upon God; they said, "This Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt," Ex. 33. But the moment this unbelief gets hold of their hearts, the desert becomes thoroughly and insupportably painful to them, and they say, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in the wilderness! and wherefore hath Jehovah brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make us a captain, and let us return into Egypt," v. 1-4. See what a miserably wicked state of unbelief they had got into, so as to attribute to Jehovah Himself their trials and difficulties. This is a snare to which even Christians are exposed. We are conscious that it is the Lord that has brought us up out of bondage, and hence when trials come upon us our hearts are apt to say. This comes of my being a Christian, - the Lord has brought me into these difficulties. Now, had Canaan been on the hearts of the children of Israel, they would have said, Thank God that we are thus far on our way to Canaan. Let the difficulties be what they might, if they had felt, By the word of Jehovah we have been brought here, there would have been thanksgiving and not murmuring. But they stopped at the point where they were, instead of looking at it as but a step on the way to the glorious land before them. There was the pretence of thoughtfulness for others - their wives and children, though in reality it was only selfishness.

Verses 6-9. Joshua and Caleb speak of the exceeding goodness of the land, and add, "If Jehovah delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against Jehovah, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and Jehovah is with us: fear them not." Their confidence is in Him.

280 "But all the congregation bade stone them with stones." The moment that was spoken which should have cheered the people, it brought out positive hostility.

Verses 13-19. The intercession of Moses comes in, based on the testimony Jehovah had given of Himself. (Compare Ex. 34:6, 7.) The principle of it is this, the perfect identification of Jehovah with His people. He presses on Jehovah that His own glory is bound up with the preservation and blessing of His people, is inseparable from them.

Two things result. Jehovah acts according to the faith of Moses, as He ever does according to the faith that is in us (v. 20); but He sends the children of Israel into the desert to remain there until all the men that came up out of Egypt fell,

There is another thing also to notice. When the children of Israel will not go up in faith into the promised land, Jehovah sends them a long way round the desert. Two things accompany this: one as the result of it, the other pure grace. If they have to march round the desert, Jehovah cannot leave them alone; He must go round with them, guiding them by His pillar of fire and of cloud all the way. His grace abounds over sin. Secondly, Caleb and Joshua must go the long way round too. They had not gone with the people in their evil; but as to the pain and trial of the march which the unbelief of the others had caused, they are obliged to go along with the people, and to bear a part of it. This is what we must make up our minds to. If the church has failed, we must make up our minds to accompany it in its course of sorrow, though not in its course of sin. As far as Caleb and Joshua were concerned, there was the exercise of grace, and patience, and love. It was blessed to them, for God was faithful in keeping them, whilst the rest fell in the wilderness. Caleb is able to say, at the end of the forty years, that he is as strong for war as at the beginning, "both to go out, and to come in," Josh. 14. But the faithful, though they had the consciousness that God was with them, were obliged to accompany the unfaithful in their course of sorrow, arising from the position into which they had brought themselves,

This is our place. In the spirit of love, of patience, and of humiliation, we have always to take the place of those who have sinned. See Daniel. Though himself personally righteous Daniel confesses the people's sin as his own, saying, "O Lord . . . we have sinned, and have committed iniquity . . . to us belongeth confusion of face," etc. (Dan. 9). The sin and evil of those who have sinned should be confessed by the remnant; who, though not partakers of the sin, must yet be partakers of the consequences of it, suffering in all the affliction with true sympathy and fellowship.

281 In applying this practically to ourselves, what was it that led to the very need of their having Jehovah with them on the march? The soul not being set on (their not having their affections occupied with) the blessings of the promised land. And that which we have to seek is that our souls may "abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost dwelling in us becomes the earnest of those better things in our hearts; and reveals to us that it is Jehovah's land, the land which He has given us, that He is bringing us into. If we are able to say, This is the fruit of the land which Jehovah has given us, - if our hearts affections are dwelling on the land, all the strength of the Anakim is as nothing. No matter, then, as to preventing us from getting there, what may be the trial and difficulty by the way. But the moment we lose the consciousness of what is ours, the moment we forget that Jehovah has given us the land, difficulties and trials occupy our mind, and become too great for us; we fall under the power of them. This results from our losing sight of what belongs to us in hope. We cannot have our hearts fixed on Canaan without being conscious that Jehovah's strength is with us.

If I rest in circumstances I am apt to blame the Lord for bringing me there. Nobody ever thought of the blessedness of being with Jesus in the glory, and of being like Him there, no one ever entered in spirit really there without being conscious that it was Jehovah's strength that would bring him there. Then all in

the way is a mere circumstance.

What I desire for you and for myself, beloved, is that we may avoid "despising the pleasant land." And do not let us say that we are not "despising" it if we are not thinking often about it. If we are not thinking of Jesus where He is, and of being with Him there, we are "despising the pleasant land." May we "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

We must not suppose that the scriptures do not supply to the new man the details of the glory that belongs to us. But they are details known only to faith. It is only just so far as we are in present communion with the Lord that we shall understand and enjoy them. Memory will not do. There is no possibility of exercising memory about the objects of hope. We must be filled with the Spirit. That which will fill up our joy is Christ Himself, who fills all things. We find a fund of detail about the glory when we know, by the power of the Holy Ghost, what Christ is for us - Christ glorified. just as the poor robber (taught of the Holy Ghost) could state the whole life of Christ, though he had never known Him before as if he had been His intimate friend, saying to his companion, "This man has done nothing amiss," so the soul, when taught by the Holy Ghost, has Jesus as the object of its affections, and knows and realizes it. The mind then becomes occupied with the object of its hope in glory, and the individual is able to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." All the circumstances which happen to us only come in by the way, Instead of having the thoughts down here in the trouble, bringing God down into it, we are lifted clean out of it into glory. This sets us on our "high places," when, otherwise, there would be the feeling in the heart, "Why hath Jehovah brought us into this land to fall by the sword," etc. The Holy Ghost delights to take of the things of Christ and shew them to us (John 16:13-15).

282 The Lord give us, in realizing the fulness of Jesus, to have our souls in the sweet savour of divine delight in Him, dwelling by faith in the promised land, that we may know what our hope is, as well as what is the ground of our hope. And ever let us remember that it is not by any effort of memory but by the power of communion in the Holy Ghost that we can have the present consciousness and enjoyment of those things "which God hath prepared for them that love him."

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