

Sunday 27th September 2015 AM Entering rest - Numbers 13-14

Title: Entering rest - Numbers 13-14

Purpose: Learning positive lessons from a very negative episode. Learning what steps we can take to ensure we enter God's rest.

INTRODUCTION

Holiday and horse riding

One of the great things about going away on holiday (and we were just the other week away in sunny Wales) is that you get to do things that you don't normally do.

So for David, Ayanda and myself we went for an hour's horse riding and it we learned a lot about horses as none of us had done hardly any horse riding before.

Talking with the lady who was leading my horse (Arnie) the key lesson I learned about horses is that they actually need the rider to be relaxed and also, more importantly, to direct and give clear instructions to the horse.

If you are nervous and the signals you give to the horse via your reins or via your heels are timid and unclear, the horse will feel confused.

Jumping a fence

Apparently the most scary type of horse riding is cross-country.

This is where you are getting the horse to jump over obstacles, like hedges and fences that are not designed to fall over if the horse should clip them.

Imagine that you are wanting a horse to jump a hurdle, to soar over perhaps a fence and yet you do not give him a clear and confident signal - well very likely the horse will suddenly decide that it can't do and throw you off!!

Today

This morning we join the Israelites at **Kadesh-Barnea** and this is the place where God wants them to go into the land that He is giving them.

It is fair to say that they were not confused about what God had in mind. All along God had made it clear about His desire to give them this land flowing with milk and honey:

- **the Patriarchs** - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - had all been told of God's plan to give them this land of Canaan.
- **Moses himself** - had also had this knowledge repeated to him on numerous occasions.

Even after the sad episode when Israel sinned by making a golden calf, after Moses had interceded for them God said: (Exodus 33 verses 1-3) "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and **go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.'** I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. **Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey.**"

So the Israelites were not in any doubt as to the plans that God had in mind for them. They knew that they were good plans too. A land of milk and honey.

Just as we read in [Jeremiah 29 Verse 11](#) "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Q. So what happens at Kadesh?

Well as the passage tells us, they flunk it. They come to this hurdle that they must jump and rather than pushing forward and over, they balk, they pull back and they take a terrible tumble.

Kadesh now becomes known as a place of defeat, a place of failure and not (as it should have been) a place of faith.

We have our own hurdles to jump

Now the truth is that Scripture is ever true to real life - and as a church, and also as individuals we have fences that we have to face and hurdles that we have to make it over through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's intention is that we should:

- exercise faith
- RATHER THAN experience failure

Other passages

Now one of the things that I value most about Scripture is the fact that time and time again, we can go to other places in the Bible to find extra light to help us understand the passage that we are looking at.

And this morning we will make use of this by dipping into 2 other passages that have helpful things to pass onto us.

The first of these is in [Hebrews chapter 3 and 4](#) which makes very direct reference to these events here in the book of Numbers.

And so as not to get distracted by these other chapters I'm just going to quote a couple of sections which give us the all important gist of the matter:

[Hebrews 3 verses 7-13](#) " So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, '**Their hearts are always going astray**, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.' " See to it, brothers, that none of you **has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God**. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

And then in the following chapter we have a one line solution, a one line imperative/command as to what we should do:

[Hebrews 4 verse 11](#) "Let us, therefore, **make every effort to enter that rest**, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."

So really this passage tells us how we should approach Numbers 13&14:

- we should "do what it takes"
- we should "make every effort" **TO ENTER THAT REST**

And that is exactly how I want to come at this section - I want us to be able to answer:

Q. What steps can I take, how can I make every effort, in order to ENTER THE REST THAT GOD INTENDS FOR ME?

And there are 5 simple steps (and I'm not going to spend a long time on any of them). 5 simple steps which they got wrong and which we, by comparison, can make sure that we will get right.

Step #1] Believe in God's power

This was what separated Joshua and Caleb apart from the other 10 leaders, the other 10 spies - they believed that God had the power to do what He said He would whereas the others found it too incredible, too unbelievable.

What links together all of the 5 steps that we need to make sure we have in place - is the issue of TRUST.

At the start of Chapter 13 the impression we get is that the LORD instructs Moses to get 12 leaders together and then send them off to spy out the land so that they will have the military information they need to go in and conquer the various Canaanite inhabitants.

Well this is where we again make use of extra passages that help us to know what is fully going on.

Deuteronomy chapter 1 is where Moses is giving the new generation of the Israelites a history lesson. He is telling them what happened back at **Kadesh Barnea 38 years previously** with their parents - this is what he says:

Deuteronomy 1 verses 19-21 " Then, as the Lord our God commanded us, we set out from Horeb and went toward the hill country of the Amorites through all that vast and dreadful desert that you have seen, and so we reached Kadesh Barnea. Then I said to you, "You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

So far so good OR SO IT SEEMS but read on - read on:

Deuteronomy 1 verses 22-25 " Then all of you came to me and said, "Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to."

The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe. They left and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshcol and explored it. Taking with them some of the fruit of the land, they brought it down to us and reported, "It is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us."

So now we start to see a slightly different picture that actually it is the Israelites who hatch this idea to go and spy out the land and not the LORD (at least in the first instance) - the LORD is essentially giving them the green light, He is simply giving them permission to go and do as they desire.

But really this is shown to be nothing much more than a prelude, the opening steps to RAW UNBELIEF and LACK OF TRUST IN GOD.

The verses go on:

Deuteronomy 1 verses 26-33 "But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and said, "The Lord hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, 'The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.' "

Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go."

Even though the Israelites have had an amazing LEGACY of God and His Almighty power displayed amongst them:

- So for example just think of all the miraculous plagues in Egypt
- think of the unheard of crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground
- think of the way in which they had a daily miracle with the Bread of Heaven coming down for them - the manna
- think of the way in which they are shielded from the sun by the cloud during the day and given the light by night through the pillar of fire
- and we could go on and on

Are you properly aware of the LEGACY of God's mighty acting that is described in Scripture - things like the life of Jesus, His death on the Cross for you, His Resurrection and the fact that He will certainly come again to take us to be with Himself.

Are you properly aware of the countless times that God has stepped into the fabric of your everyday life and worked for you, protected you, spoken His word to you to show you the way to go etc. etc.

Let look at a 2nd step:

Step #2] Believe in God's plan

We have to believe in **God's power**

- but we **ALSO** have to believe in **God's plan**.

Q. What does the REST of God mean?

Now we do well at this point to just ask ourselves what it means to enter into God's rest.

The people were headed to the promised land - to Canaan - that land flowing with milk and honey.

Q. But what does that mean for us?

Q. Is this meant to be a picture of heaven?

Well not really - you see when they did finally go into the land under Joshua's leadership - they weren't back in paradise - they still had to face enemies, they still had to fight battles, they still continued to sin and fall under the judgment of God.

Not it is better to understand that Canaan, the promised land represents the will of God for us. It is, if you like our inheritance in this life which **Ephesians 2 verse 10** speaks about when it says:

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

God has a plan for each and every one of us and he wants us to fully enter into that plan and to therefore know the blessing that comes from:

- being in God's people
- in God's place
- and under His perfect plan

God's plan may seem *not* what we would chose

The problem comes for us - when what God chooses as His perfect plan for our lives doesn't seem to either match up to our own expectations OR when it doesn't seem to make normal sense to us.

So many times we don't understand why the way God leads us doesn't seem to be the way we would have things.

I bet many of us have asked the question at times - Q. Why is God doing this to me? Q. Why has God allowed this thing to happen OR not to happen?

So we have to not only believe in God's power BUT WE ALSO have to believe in God's plan - to know that He knows BOTH what He is doing and How He is wanting to do it.

A third step:

Step #3] Believe in God's leaders

You really do have to thank God that He, in His wisdom, has chosen to make some people leaders.

Q. What if everyone was the same in God's economy? Q. What if there were no leaders? No Shepherds only Sheep?

But so often we don't place much value on the leaders we are given OR the advice which they bring.

In this case their leaders are Moses and Aaron and also Joshua and that fine lad Caleb.

And here in this account in Numbers 13&14 - we see that these leaders are not silent, they are not inactive either.

Caleb, when he has heard the bad report that the 10 spies are giving speaks out and speaks up:

(Numbers 13 verse 30) " 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."

And when this advice is ignored and they really start to spread around doom and gloom - the following day the 4 good leaders take action by falling down in protest before the whole community and by tearing their clothes (a very extreme expression of grief).

This is one way they try to stem the rising rebellion. As well as this - to lead the people in terms of their thinking the 2 good spies (Caleb and Joshua) speak up again:

Numbers 14 verses 7-9" "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 swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

We should learn to listen to our leaders.

Q. Why - is it because they are infallible? No - they are also fallen sinners and they too have to be a part of the struggle that is the normal Christian life - BUT - they are those that are usually somewhat further down the road - they are often those who have experienced more and typically they are those that God has placed a special burden, a special calling to serve him in this capacity.

We do well to heed our leaders and to seek out their advise because God has elected to use that as one channel of blessing, one way in which He deliberately chooses to use for our help and blessing.

A fourth step to help us to be able to ENTER GOD'S REST that He has graciously planned for each on of us:

Step #4] Believe in God's discipline

The end of our passage there in Numbers 14 shows us that it is not a good thing to ignore God's discipline.

The truth is that if they had only learned their lessons earlier on they would never have got into such extreme difficulty. They were experiencing the ultimate in discipline - 40 years of wandering and being prevented from partaking of God's plan for them - they would all fall in the desert and be buried there by the younger generation (all except 2 of them Joshua and Caleb who had a different spirit, a different heart attitude).

Time and again in the earlier travels they had sinned and been disciplined and somehow they had also forgotten this as well as all of God's goodness and all of His miracles.

Q. If you consider yourself a Christian - Have you ever experienced the discipline of God? If you do not think you have then I would have to say that it is very strange - because the letter of Hebrews has a few helpful things to explain about God's discipline there in Hebrews chapter 12.

Summarising it - God metes out loving discipline upon ALL his spiritual children IN JUST THE SAME WAY AS LOVING PARENTS DISCIPLINE THEIR CHILDREN. He explains that only illegitimate children are not disciplined.

In fact that we should be encouraged when we become aware of God's discipline. Q. Why?

- because it reminds us that we are true children of God
- because it is good for us
- because when we have learned from it we will be stronger, we will be the better for it

Q. Do you believe in God's discipline?

If so: Q. Are you aware of one or more areas in which you sense that God is standing against you - where he is withholding his blessing and you are not aware of the radiance of His smile?

If so: Respond to it - talk to God - repent, turn, put right that which is the obstacle to His ongoing blessing.

All of God's discipline is loving and is full of His mercy and is solely designed to rein us in and back onto the best path for our lives.

One final lesson, a final step:

Step #5] Believe in God's mercy

We must never let discouragement have the final word - these people allowed discouragement to take root in them and it

sunk them.

The leader's who were responsible for spreading a bad and demoralising report are judged - they immediately die because they have done such a massive disservice to the people. They hold a higher responsibility - simply because they are teachers, they are the leaders. Their influence counts for more than just an ordinary rank-and-file Israelite.

Moses' prayer of intercession

But see Moses' prayer of intercession that comes in from Verse 13 in Chapter 14.

It is not the first time that God has said to Moses that he will wipe out the people and start again. After the sad episode when they had had the 10 commandments and then Moses seemed to be away a bit too long and so they get Aaron to make them a golden calf.

Again Moses intercedes and God exercises great mercy.

This is similar here. Q. Does God actually want to destroy His people? Well - no.

Really it is an invitation to Moses to step in and intercede.

Q. Now on what basis does Moses successfully intercede? Well there are a couple of important things we should see:

- FIRST - Moses' concern is straightaway for God and for His reputation. (You can see that from Verses 13 & 16) Moses realises that the nations (especially the Egyptians) will conclude that God was not able to take them into the promised land - they would conclude that He was perhaps not willing to take them in, not loving enough to do so.

These are all the things that people say about God today.

- THE SECOND THING - is that Moses' calls to mind the character of God. When God showed Moses His glory and Moses saw His back, God proclaimed His name, that is He declared the sort of God He is:

We have the quotation in Verse 18 ***READ***

- THE THIRD THING - is to see that God is rich in MERCY, he forgives the people (Verse 20).

Yet we have to see that God will not be mocked - SIN always caused us to SUFFER and this comes out in Verse 34 ***READ***

Q. Do you believe in God's mercy being still operative?

You might say - Q. Well who is going to intercede for us to get that mercy? And that is a good question - a question that the book of Hebrews answers for us:

Hebrews 9 verse 15 "For this reason **Christ is the MEDIATOR of a new covenant**, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

And again in Hebrews 7 verse 24 and 25 we read:

"...because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, **BECAUSE he always lives to intercede for them.**"

CONCLUSION

I want to return to where we began and horse riding.

If a rider has peace and confidence, if a rider gives clear commands to his horse then both rider and horse will be able to get over the fences, the obstacles before them.

When the Israelites came to get up and go in to the promised land - they began to pull back, they began to give into fear and so they began to stumble badly in unbelief and in the end tragically they were ***NOT* ABLE TO ENTER INTO GOD'S REST!!**

Q. So what of you? Q. Are you any better than they?

When something difficult confronts us - when a fence looms large in front of us - Q. What happens to our faith?

Q. Are we continually entering into God's plan for us - or are we filled with fear and fall back?

Q. What can we do?

Well we simply learn the lessons that God put in Scripture for us and we follow the invitation of Hebrews regarding this passage to "**MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER GOD'S REST**":

- Believe in His Power - are you doing that?
- Believe in His Plan - are you heading to the promised land that God has marked out for your life OR are you just going on the way that you are carving out?
- Believe in His Leader's - they are put their by God - for the precise purpose of shining light on God's ways and truth
- Believe in His Discipline - it is one great authentic mark of the fact that He is your Father and that You are His child
- Believe in His Mercy - maybe that is exactly what you need right now - well if it is - then come to Jesus for He ever lives to make intercession so that you may find forgiveness for your sins and encourage you to turn back and journey on

Let's pray ... AMEN