

Series – Surviving the Wilderness

VBC

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Numbers 13

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“Will We Seize Our Divine Moment?”

Two years ago, I was in Colorado Springs for meetings

- And decided to visit the AFA
- What caught my attention was the Visitor Center
- Where life as a cadet is impressively laid out
- I suddenly heard this voice in my mind whisper “what if...”
 - For the Academy had once been my dream
 - I had spent a year preparing for my appointment
 - But it all changed, in one moment, when I (just before getting on the plane to report for duty) changed my mind

All of us have DEFINING MOMENTS - where the choices we make can radically impact the course of our lives

- In our text, Numbers 13, Israel was about to encounter one such moment

From their moment of deliverance at the Red Sea, Israel had experienced numerous moments in the desert

- And now, having traveled some 100 miles - through a great and terrible wilderness - “a howling waste” (Deut 32:10), a moment of decision was before them
- In a parallel text it tells us Moses gathered the people and declared
 - “See, the Lord has given you the land - go and take possession of your inheritance - do not fear or be dismayed” (Deut 1:21)
- IT WAS TIME TO ACT UPON THE PROMISES GOD HAD GIVEN
 - Going all the way back to God’s words to Abraham

It’s with this background we come to Num 13:1-2 (read)

- So in representative fashion - Moses sent them out (vs. 3-16)
 - With specific instructions (read vs. 17-20)
- As vs. 21-24 tell us, they headed north - all the way to present Lebanon (probably 300-500 miles in a period of 40 days)

- And the committee came back with their findings
 - With good news (vs. 25-27)
 - Land is good
 - And bad news (vs. 28)
 - There are strong, mighty, fierce people
 - The cities are formidable - with walls up to the skies (Deut 1:28)
 - There are also the Anakim - people of an unusually large race, Goliath types
- Unlike most of the rest, Caleb could see this was a moment to seize (vs. 30)
 - With a God dominated imagination, he declared "Let's go"
 - What they saw as obstacles, Caleb saw as opportunity
 - If there are giants, if the walls are too high, that is God's problem
- But for others on the committee, this was not a moment to seize, but one to pass
 - It would be impossible, insurmountable (vs. 31-33)
 - They saw themselves as powerless insects (vs. 33)
 - Grasshoppers to be stepped on, pinched from the stalks
- It was a God moment
 - Chapter 13 is a hinge chapter in the book of Numbers
 - Israel would have to decide
 - Would they seize the opportunity, or pass?

Maybe not as dramatically, but sometimes we will face a similar moment

- How do we make sure we seize the moments God serves up?
- This story tells us four things

1) LISTEN FOR THE MOMENTS

- Though not every moment has the same importance (and many seem small enough to ignore)
- Some are big enough to determine one's course, impact one's life forever
- We are wandering in this in between - in this thing called time - where God is always serving up the season, the chapter, the moment
 - a) A moment comes to receive Jesus
 - b) A chapter is before us - to prepare for a career
 - c) A times may come when we must choose whether or not to marry
 - d) A season comes to pursue God's call on our lives
 - e) A moment is upon us to cast a vote - speak out for righteousness
 - f) For the church - we are in a moment
 - When culture is open to spirituality
 - Will we offer spirituality with depth, substance?
 - ie Jesus?

- The scary thing-is that moments are not static - they are fluid
 - They wait for no one - they are either seized or lost
 - They come - and then they go
 - Sometimes they come back around, but they are the exception
 - Illustration: AFA, I called back - it was too late
 - As we will see in this unfolding story - this would be the case for Israel
- Are we listening?
- It's not enough to listen for the moments
- 2) THINK FORWARD - NOT BACKWARD
 - Israel failed to seize its moment because the people were leaning in the wrong direction
 - Rather than positioning themselves for the future, they were still bound to their past
 - It was their default button
 - Even though God had carried them through the desert, as a father carries a son (Deut 1:31)
 - Every time any kind of challenge came up - Egypt popped up on the screen
 - "Would that we had died in Egypt" (Ex 16:3)
 - "Why have you brought us from Egypt?" (Ex 17:3)
 - "We remember the onions and leeks in Egypt" (Num 11:5)
 - "Let's return to Egypt" (Num 14:4)
 - THEY HAD NOT SEVERED TIES
 - They pined away for safe enslavement

Application - Part of our failure in seizing God's moment may relate to the same tendency

- We are too married to the past
- We are unable to let go
- We will never move forward in our faith because if we keep hanging on to past sins
- Never move forward in our marriage if we keep hanging on to past hurts
- Never seize what God is serving up if we keep holding on to past memories

Illustration: In my first church, we talked a lot about the future

- We had a vision, we could see a promised land of sorts
- But we could never seize it, because all too many could not let go of the 40's and 50's
- The past was their security

- Caleb stands as the working model here
 - Somewhere he broke bonds with his past
 - Secured his ties with the future

- In order to seize the moment...

3) ANTICIPATE THE GIANTS WITHIN THE OPPORTUNITIES

- Divine moments almost always involve risk, always require faith
- For they involve the unknown, the unseen, the giants
- We should not be surprised with the report of the spies
- In almost every God story, there are giants
 - David would face his Goliath
 - Jeremiah would face the giant of an unresponsive city
 - Hezekiah would face the Assyrians
- You and I face our own
- God invites us to take a step of faith, and we suddenly face resistance
- We do what we sense is a God honoring step, and face financial risk
- We take a step to be a visionary church, and face uncomfortable unknowns
- Anything stamped with God will come with risk, conflict
 - The enemy is always intent on stopping God's movement
- Israel wanted what most of us want - A NO RISK CLAUSE
- A promised land domesticated, safe
- They wanted to be in a position where faith would be unnecessary
- Problem: If we insist upon security and certainty, like Israel, we settle for the past
 - We settle for a life without adventure
 - A life of mundane predictability
 - A life that misses the moments
- How do we seize our divine moments?

- Here's perhaps the biggest lesson of the story

4) GO UNLESS YOU GET A "NO"

- When these moments come, those who are listening for them, those who are thinking forward, those who are anticipating the giants, SEIZE THEM
- Unfortunately, many of our moments are missed because we are more interested in processing than deciding
 - This was Israel
 - They were already commissioned to go, but they wanted more information

- Does it strike you as strange what Moses asked them to find out?
 - Soil samples, troop strength
 - a) What did it matter if the land was good or bad, how is the soil?
 - God had already declared two years earlier “I am bringing you to a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:17)
 - b) What did it matter how formidable the enemy?
 - God had already told them the land was theirs
 - Already conquered Pharaoh’s army
 - What they wanted was a report that would suggest that faith is not necessary
 - How often we do this
 - To Gideon: “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior-go and save Israel”
 - Gideon’s response: “Lord, I need a sign”
 - Moses: “Go, I am sending you”
 - Moses: “Who am I that I should go?” (Ex 3:11)
 - “Suppose I go and they ask - who is this God?”
 - “What if they don’t believe me?”
 - “Lord, I have never been eloquent”
 - “Lord-please send someone else”
 - McManus in his book *Seizing your Divine Moments*
 - “Too many divine opportunities are lost because we keep waiting for a word when the word has already been given”
 - Are there times we claim to be waiting on God - when God is waiting on us?
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- Illustration: Car accident years ago, the light turned green
 - And I went, only the car in front of me did not
 - “Why didn’t you go?”
 - I will never forget her response - “the green light scared me”
 - Could it be the green light scares us?

William Wilberforce entered the House of Commons in the late 1700’s

- Scanned where history had brought the world
- Saw with clarity the atrocities of slave trade
- And heard his moment, to argue for a radical reversal of British policies
- For 46 years he devoted his life to this - it was his moment
 - Undeterred by the giants of failing health, death threats
 - He went full force
 - And witnessed the abolition of slave trade

Will we seize our moments - as a church, as individuals - or let them slip away?