



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

October 2, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

Moses: Fear and Loathing (Numbers 13:17-21, 25-33; 14:1-4)

There are moments when I read a passage of Scripture and think, “how can this possibly apply to the real world?” Sometimes Jesus’ command to “turn the other cheek,” his call to “release the captives,” or the Torah’s system of forgiving all debt feel like impossible dreams that couldn’t work in modern society. Other parts, like Jonah being swallowed by a fish, Balaam’s donkey speaking to him, all the water in Egypt turning to blood, or Paul reviving a man who fell out of a building push my understanding of how the world works, and feel more like the stuff of legend than history.

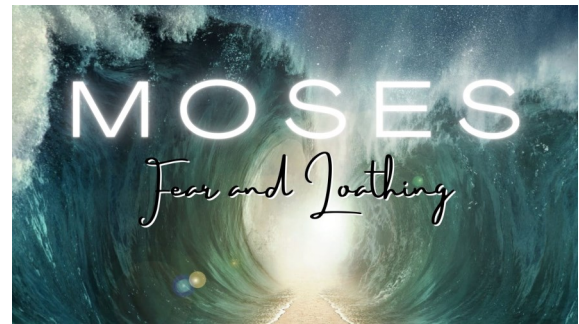
Then sometimes I read a passage of our story and it screams at me with its authenticity and timeliness. Today’s passage is one of those stories that feels incredible because of how credible it is.

The people have fled Egypt. They have traveled through the wilderness. They have received the Law of God and are now on the brink of the Promised Land. Promises made to Abram 500 years ago are about to be fulfilled. They have lived through a series of signs that defy understanding. They have witnessed the destruction of the greatest army in the world. They have journeyed through a difficult terrain. Now on the borders of Canaan, they send out scouts into the land.

The report is mixed. The land is everything that had been promised. It is fertile—flowing with milk and honey. But it is occupied. There are people there, and they are strong. They have cities and fortifications. Occupying this land is not going to be easy. They have been through so much together and now they stand on the precipice of something new, and they are fearful.

There is no question that the task in front of them was daunting, but they brought back with them fruit of the land. A couple of the scouts reported that they should move into the Land despite the obstacles, knowing that God would be with them. Think, after all, of all they had seen God do for them up to this point. Caleb and Joshua believed that with God on their side, they would be able to move into Canaan, even with the difficulty that lie in front of them. And then the story gets real. Like, uncomfortably, unnervingly timely:

“But the men who went up with him said, “We can’t go up against the people because they are stronger than we.”³² They started a rumor about the land that they had explored, telling the Israelites, “The land that we crossed over to explore is a land that devours its residents. All the people we saw in it are huge men.³³ We saw there the Nephilim ... We saw ourselves as grasshoppers, and that’s how we appeared to them.”



They ignore the evidence (the fruit in their hands). They make up rumors. They say they saw Nephilim (a legendary people with an obscure reference in Genesis that talks of a race of giants who were related to angels. The stories of the Nephilim were much like ancient Greek stories of the cyclops or centaurs. They were a legend that most understood as fiction, but were still a source of cultural fear).

Instead of trusting the evidence—the land is fruitful, not terrible. Instead of trusting God who had delivered them already, the people were gripped by the fear of lies and rumor. Then this is the part that feels truly familiar. They decide they want to go back to Egypt.

Progress is scary. The unknown future of a new land and a changing people was too much for them to face, so they decided that they would rather go back to a simpler time. Nevermind that in that time they were slaves. Nevermind the struggle that they have overcome thus far. Nevermind the promise of God to lead them to a better place. The fear was too much and the people wanted to go back.

And here we stand. We have been through so much as a people. We have overcome. We have seen God do great things. We have been through the wilderness and have experienced God’s provision through the difficult times. There is still much to overcome. The future has real obstacles. We have real difficulties in front of us. Are we going to fall prey to a toxic sense of nostalgia? Are we going to listen to the rumors that destabilize our society? Are we going to believe the lies that there are “giants in the land?” Are we going to fear the boogymen and regress back to Egypt? Are we going to submit ourselves to slavery again?

Or will we trust in God? God showed great signs and wonders and overcame Pharaoh. God delivered the people from slavery and brought them to the brink of the Promise. Will we trust in the promise of God or the lies of the fearful? We face a turning point as a people. Where will we place our trust?