

**Text: Numbers 13-14**

**Title: “Re:Vision”**

**ILLUSTRATION** – On my recent trip to India our team rode the train on a long journey out to a city where we would be ministering. On our return trip we were on an overnight sleeper train. Unlike trains or subways here in the US, on Indian trains it’s hard to know where you are at any given time. There’s no announcement by the conductor that we are pulling into a particular station. You just have to look out of the window and hope to catch a glimpse of a sign identifying the station where you’re stopping. At night that is virtually impossible. So, on this trip I turned on the GPS on my phone to find out exactly where we were on the journey so I would know when we arrived. And sure enough, on the other side of the world Apple Maps found us. There was that little blue dot showing me exactly where we were on the journey.

We need that kind of orientation in life as persons, as families and as a church. Where are we on the journey God has for us as a church? Let’s open our Bibles to Numbers 13. In the Bible we see God has His people on a journey, and He’s always with His people. Every church has a past and a future along this journey. And it’s important from time to time to pull out God’s GPS to ask Him to show us where we are on the journey. Where have we been? Where are we going? How will we get there?

**ILLUSTRATION** – It’s like the airplane pilot who came over the intercom to say, “Ladies and gentlemen, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that we have lost our navigational system and we don’t know where we are. But the good news is that we are making excellent time. We don’t want to be that way.

Numbers 13 drops us down in the middle of the journey of God’s people from their captivity in Egypt on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan. You can think about this journey in terms of three words: **EXODUS, WILDERNESS AND PROMISE.**

God has delivered Israel in the EXODUS. With mighty power God rescued His people from bondage in Egypt, under the leadership of a man named Moses. God brought them to the Red Sea with the powerful Egyptian army chasing them from behind. Then God opened up the sea and made a path for them right through the bed of the sea. When they reached the other side they watched as God destroyed the mighty Egyptian army.

**God delivered them *from* something, but He also delivered them *for* something.** Their ultimate destiny was to possess the land of PROMISE called Canaan. Hundreds of years before this God called a man named Abraham and brought him to this place called Canaan, what we know today as Israel. And God made a covenant with Abraham promising that his descendants would one day possess that land where he was standing. God never forgets a promise. He would do what He said He would do.

**But between the EXODUS and the PROMISE was the WILDERNESS.** Between Egypt and Canaan was a journey of hundreds of miles through the desert wilderness. So here we have

more than a million men, women and children walking with their possessions through a desert wasteland. And yet these were the people of God, redeemed by His mighty hand. And He took care of them on the journey. He GUIDED them with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He PROVIDED for them by supplying supernatural food called manna. He brought them to places where He miraculously provided water for them. God PROTECTED them when they were attacked. And then God TAUGHT them when He brought them to a place called Mt. Sinai. God called Moses up on the mountain and gave to him the Law of God (including the Ten Commandments) that would be God's covenant with His people.

But the WILDERNESS was a testing time for Israel, and all of us go through wilderness experiences in our lives. And even churches can go through wilderness seasons. You see, in spite of God's faithfulness in the wilderness, time after time Israel faltered in their faith. They distrusted and disobeyed God. When they got thirsty or hungry they complained and demanded to go back to Egypt. There was something in their hearts that made them constantly long for the security of the past rather than to courageously accept the calling of God to be a new people with a new destiny. Even the leader Moses failed at times along the way in the wilderness. So there was an imperfect leader leading an imperfect people ... but they had a perfect God.

Between the EXODUS and the PROMISE is this critical event in the WILDERNESS described in Numbers 13. Here in what is called the Desert of Paran they have the opportunity to trust God by stepping into the glorious promised future He has for them. Will they pass the test?

### **Read Numbers 13:1-3.**

Now there's some important information here. Remember, God had already promised to give the land of Canaan to His people. And yet now God commands Moses to send some people into the land to explore the land. Why? He wants His people to have a vision of the future. That's what vision is ... a glimpse of the future God has for His people ... for us. These men were to be leaders and representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel. Why? People follow leaders. And it's important that there are leaders who can lift the eyes of the people to see God's future. So here is the assignment for the twelve "spies."

### **Read Numbers 13:17-20.**

The spies were not to explore Canaan to decide "if" they would go in and possess the land. They were to explore Canaan in order to understand "how" they would possess the land. What are the blessings that are awaiting us? What are the challenges awaiting us? How should we prepare for the future?

So they explored the land and then they came back with the evidence that God did indeed have a wonderful land set apart for them. They even brought back some of the abundant fruit that grew there. And they gave this report:

### **Read Numbers 13:26-27.**

Okay. This is great. So far, so good. But...

**Read Numbers 13:28-29.**

We learn later that only two of the twelve caught God's vision for the future ... Joshua and Caleb. The rest were fearful, doubtful and skeptical. And in v.30 Caleb speaks up:

**Read Numbers 13:30-33.**

Notice they said, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." They were not seeing themselves as the victorious people of God moving confidently toward His promised future. Instead of seeing a big God and little giants, they saw a little God and big giants. And this negative and cynical attitude soon spread to the whole community.

**Read Numbers 14:1-4.**

The remainder of Numbers 14 gives the sad details of the consequences of doubts and fears. God determined that the generation of skeptical leaders who were so tied to the past would die in the wilderness. Not even Moses would be able to take the people in. He would die only seeing the Promised Land from a distance. But God's vision will prevail. The next generation would go in and possess the land. Under the leadership of Moses' assistant Joshua, one of the two spies who brought back the favorable report, Israel would go in to Canaan, push out the inhabitants of the land and establish themselves in the exciting future where they would live as God's holy people. It will be a new day ... a new home ... a new worship ... a new purpose to spread the glory of God to the nations.

The rest of Numbers and Deuteronomy describe how God prepared His people spiritually to go in to their promised destiny as the new covenant people of God.

Now why go through this detail of the journey of Israel from EXODUS to WILDERNESS to PROMISE? It is because this is the pattern God often uses with His people. Honestly, I sense that for the past few years we've been in a kind of wilderness as a church. As a leader my heart is broken over it. I know many of you are burdened. We know our past but we're not quite sure about our future. We've had our struggles just like Israel in the wilderness. I have had my struggles as a leader trying to keep us moving toward God's future. At times I have failed at that and I am profoundly sorry.

But listen ... God isn't finished with our church. We are the people of God with a promised destiny. God is always faithful to His people through the wilderness. We must trust Him and obey. What we need in this hour in the life of our church is to re-envision the future God has for us so that we can emerge as God's faithful church in our city. Just like Moses sent the spies into the Promised Land, we need to get a glimpse of the glorious future God has for us in proclaiming the Gospel in our city and in the world beyond. What kind of church does God want us to be in order that we might step into that exciting future?

We need to understand three crucial factors:

- **OUR CHURCH IS CHANGING.**

We have lost some of our strength in the last few years. As we've gone through this "wilderness" experience there have been some who just didn't feel led to stay with us. I understand that and I am truly sorry. But it breaks my heart.

But there's something else that is changing about our church that isn't bad ... in fact, it is a blessing. Every year our church is becoming more and more multi-generational. People are living longer, so there are more generations in our church than ever. From the youngest to the oldest we have at least five generations represented. But the great thing is that a healthy church has multiple generations working together for the sake of God's kingdom. Also...

- **OUR COMMUNITY IS CHANGING.**

By community I mean our city in general, and more particularly the area around our church. We sit in one of the most richly diverse areas in our city. We have a strong Hispanic population, but also a growing Asian and African-American population. We've made some important steps to reach to these populations, but there's so much more we have to do. This part of our city is being revitalized. People are moving back into historic districts like Fairmount, Ryan Place, Berkeley and Mistletoe Heights. City planners tell us that the south side of Fort Worth is primed for a comeback. And we need to be ready to comeback with them. Also...

- **OUR CULTURE IS CHANGING.**

The climate for ministry and witness in the United States is radically different than it was even five to ten years ago. The church in America today is slowly being pushed to the margins, but that's okay. The church has always been at its best in the margins. Who would have thought that we would see the timeless definition of marriage changed by a high court in our land? Who would have thought that our nation would turn a deaf ear to the cries of the unborn who are being aborted and their body parts sold by Planned Parenthood. The church no longer enjoys a home field advantage as we did a few years ago. Perhaps the fastest growing group in the US, spiritually speaking, are the "nones" ... people who, when asked what their religious persuasion is, simply mark "none." But God is still reaching to our culture. And He will do it through churches that aren't afraid to be the true people of God shining as light in the darkness.

**We must be spiritually fit and strategically refitted in order to be ready for God's future for us.**

Here's how we will do that. Just like Moses sent spies into the Promised Land to learn what they could about their destiny we need a similar process. We are calling it "**Strategic**

**Envisioning.”** This is a process that will help us refocus the vision of our church on God’s great future.

With the overwhelming support of our deacons we have secured the services of The Malphurs Group to assist us in this process. They have come alongside 100s of churches like ours to help them re-envision God’s future. You may ask, “Why can’t we just figure this out ourselves?” We could try, but sometimes we aren’t as objective as we need to be ... particularly those of us who have been here a long time. We may not see ourselves accurately. We may not see our community with the eyes we need to. So we believe this group will help us immensely.

It starts with the recruitment of what is called the Strategic Leadership Team. The Malphurs Group has asked us to recruit this team of about 20 people who represent the vast diversity of our church. We need women and men who are like Joshua and Caleb ... who can honestly see the giants in the land, but who have a greater vision of the call of God to reach people for Jesus Christ. But then the group will be enlarged as later we add what are called Implementation Teams. The process will take six to seven months. It will involve a thorough assessment of our strengths and weaknesses ... our opportunities and our challenges. We will clarify our mission and our values, then we will emerge with a clear understanding of the vision God has for us.

This isn’t the pastor and staff coming down from the mountain with a plan, it is a vision that bubbles up from the hearts of God’s people ... a vision that is birthed in the Body of Christ as we take into account the uniqueness of our church and our community. The process will be completely transparent. We want you to know what the team is discussing. There will be a special link on our website where you can read about what’s happening each step along the way. We’ll give periodic reports in our worship services. At the end of this process we intend to have a clear plan and vision that will guide our church for the next 5-7 years as we make a lasting impact on our city for the sake of Christ.

But while this vision is taking shape there are three things that immediately need to happen:

### **WE MUST PRAY FERVENTLY!**

In Acts about 120 believers met together and prayed until the Spirit fell on the church at Pentecost. I’d like to see God raise up at least 120 people who will pray for me, for our staff and for the strategic envisioning process over the next six or seven months. Will you be one of the 120 to make up the Re:Vision Prayer Team? In your worship folder on the back of the guest card is a place for you to make this commitment. Later in the service I’ll ask you to bring it to the altar as we respond to God.

At the end of this month we will resume our monthly Evenings of Prayer and Praise. This must be a priority for us all during these days. We need wisdom from heaven and this comes when we fervently pray.

### **WE MUST GIVE GENEROUSLY!**

I am grateful that we have come through the most challenging time of the year financially and we have given more than our budget goal to date. But the future God has for us will mean we must invest more in reaching our city for Christ. And this financial burden has to be shared by all of us as we give our tithes and offerings to the Lord through His church.

In order to free up financial resources for the new vision we need to pay off the remaining balance of Lasting Legacy, the building fund for our new West Building. If you look at your worship folder you will see that our balance now has dropped below \$700,000. Because of your generosity the Finance Committee was able to apply another \$100,000 recently. That line-of-credit expires around January 1, so let's just pay it off so it doesn't have to be renewed. So between now and the end of the year let's pray and give generously, and watch how God moves.

We need to pray. We need to give. And ...

### **WE MUST UNITE OURSELVES!**

When the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land they did so as a united people. And we must unite ourselves. The Bible says we are to make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We have to work at setting aside our preferences and differences and to do what is best for the whole church. We have to be united in our passion for God. We have to be united in our love for each other. We have to be united in our commitment to stay with this great church and see her through to the future God has for us. We must be united in our commitment to follow God.

I'm confident that this process will help us discover the best way for us to worship publicly as a church. I don't know the answer now, but I'm believing God for His wisdom to show us the right way to meet for public worship. So don't panic and don't politic ... instead pray and trust that God will show us the way.

We need to be united in our hunger for authentic revival in our personal lives. I don't want my life to be hindrance to God working in our church. These are crucial times; we need to be united in our passion for God.

And as we are we will catch the vision of God. Someone has defined vision in this way: "Vision is a clear mental portrait of a preferable future." Vision is a clear picture of the future God prefers for us, and thus it is the future we must prefer for ourselves. We can move into the glorious future Christ has for us ...

**1. When we prefer the call of God more than our desire to be comfortable.**

Like Israel there's something in us that prefers the comfort of the past more than the God's calling to the future. But we can move forward when we prefer God's high calling rather than our own comfort or convenience. Next, we can move into the glorious promised future ...

**2. When we prefer the blessings of God more than anything we have to sacrifice.**

Church, just look back over the years. God has been faithful to us. We've seen God do amazing things. We must not lose heart or doubt God or ourselves. The blessings God has for us are greater than any sacrifice we may have to make for Him. Next, we can move into the glorious promised future ...

**3. When we prefer to focus on the faithfulness of God rather than the weaknesses of human leaders.**

If Moses failed as a leader, then I miserably fail at times. I ask you to forgive me. I have done my best to seek God and lead as I sense His leading, but I'm a sinner and I miss the mark. Please don't let my shortcomings or any other leader's shortcomings keep you from seeing God in His faithfulness and following Him.

The wilderness is always filled with disappointments. We can either face them with faith and trust in God, or we can face them with grumbling. God will never disappoint those who look to Him and trust in Him. Next, we can move into the glorious promised future Christ has for us ...

**4. When we prefer the glory of God no matter what challenges we have to face.**

If our purpose is not to bring glory to God in our city then our doors should be shut. We exist to bring Him glory, no matter what challenges we face. Yes, we have some giants to face, but our God is greater. We need to be reminded that when God gets ready to do a great work He always starts with a difficulty. When God gets ready to do something spectacular He always starts with something impossible. And He does it for His glory. Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Will we face difficulties? Yes. Will we face tough decisions? Yes. But we're not alone on this journey. Jesus is Lord of our church. He can move mountains. Finally, we can move into the glorious promised future Christ has for us ...

**5. When we prefer to trust God rather than be overcome by our fears.**

Yes, there's plenty to fear, humanly speaking. Will we be like the 10 spies who were overcome by fear, or will we be like Joshua and Caleb who were overwhelmed with trust in God?

**ILLUSTRATION** – Last week we remembered the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on our nation. If you're 20 years old or more you probably remember exactly where you were when you heard the news that planes had been flown into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and possibly the US Capitol, had those brave souls on United Flight 93 forced the plane down in Pennsylvania. A little over a week after that fateful day President George W. Bush addressed a

joint session of Congress. Near the end of his address President Bush said this: “These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us, because we stand in their way.”

Church we have an enemy more vicious than the worst terrorists. Satan came to steal, kill and destroy. He wants that for your life and for our church. But our Savior Jesus is greater. And He said, “But I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full.” That is the future God envisions for us.