

# Conquered by Cowardice

*Tragic Lapses*

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I'd like to read quite a number of verses both from Numbers 13 and 14 but for the sake of time we'll not read all of them so what we're going to do is read Numbers 13:1-2 and then jump to verse 17 and then read through 11 of chapter 14 and then 22-24. Got it? We'll start at Numbers 13:1 and we'll remember that we are looking at some of the Old Testament tragic lapses of faith in order to learn from them as God directs us to do in 1 Corinthians 10.

“1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.’”

Verse 17,

“17 Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, 'Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, 18 and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; 19 whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; 20 whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.' Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. 21 So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath. 22 And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. 24 The place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there. 25 And they returned from spying out the land after forty days. 26 Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit

of the land. 27 Then they told him, and said: 'We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.' 30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.' 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.' 32 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. 33 There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.'"

"1 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' 4 So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.' 5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. 6 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: 'The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, "a land which flows with milk and honey." 9 Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them.' 10 And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel."

I now pick up in verse 22,

"22 because all these men who have seen My glory," says the Lord, "and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, 23 they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. 24 But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it."

Thus for the reading of God's word.

Have you ever had a great desire that you failed to achieve because of fear? Have you ever had a great desire, something you were yearning for, something that you knew you wanted but didn't achieve and accomplish because of fear? You could probably think of a lot of examples like that. Many young men would have wanted to get to know a certain young girl but were too scared to call. Someone very close to me, in fact, had to have one of his sisters call his future wife and then quickly hand him the phone so that he could talk to the girl. If it hadn't been for that, maybe he would have never gotten that wife. Many men have dreamed of being a war hero, many boys have dreamed of being a war hero but shrank back from making that military commitment. In their youth, many people have great plans for doing great things for God but come up short because of fear.

For half a millennium, the children of Israel, likewise, had desired a land which they could call their own. It was a good desire; it was a desire that God had put in their heart and promised to them on his own integrity. Now that land was within their reach and God told them at this point, "Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you. Go up and possess it. Do not fear nor be discouraged." But what we've just read tells us that they did fear, they were discouraged and only two adults from that generation actually entered the land.

You know, fear is one of the factors that greatly shapes our lives and the question that we must answer is: whom shall we fear? Interestingly, when you look at Scripture, you find just as many commandments not to fear as you find commandments to fear God. Something around 75 times God has said in his word, "Do not fear," and something around 75 times God says in his word, "Fear the Lord." The question here is: whom shall we fear? Jesus puts it succinctly in Matthew 10:28, "And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul but rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." I would submit to us, friends, that when we get this, when we figure out who to fear and that becomes one of the driving forces in our lives, our lives will be changed.

Another goal this morning, to take a step closer to realizing this, to get this, whom we must fear. You know, there is an old saying that says: "There is no teacher like experience." Have you ever heard that? Or some variation of that? You don't know until you experience it yourself. There is no teacher like experience but God says, "Yes, that can be true but why don't you learn from the experience of somebody else?" There is no teacher like experience but why not watch what someone else experienced so that you don't fall into that same experience?

The Israelites were conquered by cowardice. They weren't conquered by a foreign army, they were conquered by cowardice so our goal this morning is to learn from their exp, to not be cowardly as some of them were and a million people were kept out of the Promised Land. So, as we've attempted to do in weeks previous, in order to learn from them we want to do three things: first of all, we want to connect with the sinner, we need to understand their story so that it becomes more a part of our story and so that our story

resonates with theirs and vice versa; secondly, we want to consider the sin in more detail; thirdly, close with Christ. That means that this whole narrative is really working us to Christ which is what Jesus says the Old Testament is meant to do.

First of all, let's attempt to connect with the sinners in this instance and to do so we'll follow the story through its five phases as I perceive them. Let's track the five phases of this story and we begin with the reconnaissance, the spy endeavor. What we see is that 12 spies were sent out into the land and that although the spies were sent out on the one hand at the request of the people, God approved of this and says to Moses, "Go and send out 12 spies." So, the command to spy out the land comes from God himself but the command to spy out the land comes with a promise that God is giving the land. That's very important: God is not saying, "Go spy out the land to see if you can take it." God is saying, "Go spy out the land so that you can develop a plan to take it and take it you shall if you go up." So, the spies were tasked to determine the following: is the land good, is this worth acquiring and he sets three "Fs" before the spies: is it fertile, are there forests, is their fruit, what is the fruit like. So, what is the land like. Then he asks them to figure this out: are the inhabitants of the land strong and what are the strongholds like, what are the towns like: are they fortified or are they more like camps.

If I could just pause here and say sometimes we're too cowardly to even engage in investigating a great challenge. This is a good step forward, the reconnaissance. We've got a great challenge before us. Let's go spy out the land. Let's see what's required here. Sometimes we shrink back when we hear about a challenge whether it's in a church, in the family or in society and we don't even do the reconnaissance. We recoil before we even have a chance to see what the facts are. So, so far, so good. They send out a reconnaissance team and Moses adds this very important detail here in the text, "But be of good courage." Be of good courage. We see this reconnaissance, "Go out and investigate the land but be courageous as you do so. Don't shrink back from fear as you're doing this investigative work."

The second phase of this story we could say is the report. So, they engage in reconnaissance, they come back and report. The report is actually very accurate. It's balanced, it's rational. It's a good report actually but the gist of the report is this: the land is very good. The inhabitants of the land are strong and the cities do seem to be impregnable and that was accurate, that was fair, that was true. In a sense, what they're saying is: it is a land worth taking. The people are big, they're thriving on this land. They have hunkered down and built fortified cities. They believe it is a land worth keeping. There is great fruit. The land is fertile. There are forests. It is a land worth taking. I suggest to you that the spies actually did a good job of gathering the facts necessary to count the cost. Jesus says before a king goes out on a military endeavor he counts the cost to see if it's worth it, to see if he's willing to pay the price to acquire that land. They counted the cost. They, at least, assessed the cost.

I would see that Joshua and Caleb would actually agree with the report as the facts are given. They knew that the conquest would not be painless. They also agree that the land was well fortified, that the cities seemed impregnable at least to human effort. I think this

is an important detail as well because sometimes our courage falters because we expect the Christian life to be easy. Again, Jesus says that no man would build a tower without first counting the cost, implying that this is going to be costly to build this tower. What Jesus is teaching here is, whether we are willing to take up the cost in the Christian life. Do we expect hardships? Do we expect difficulties? Should we not expect pain in conquering for the kingdom and taking the kingdom by force?

The spies all sort of present a unified report but Joshua and Caleb saw the report as actually proving that God was telling the truth about the riches of the land. God had promised them the land, he says, "I'm going to give you the land," and now the report proves that God has spoken well. This is a land flowing with milk and honey and if that's true, then shouldn't we also expect the part to be true where God says, "And I'm going to give you this land?" You know, if the spies had come back with some measly fruit, the people would have said, "Wow, it's not actually as luscious as we thought it would be. Maybe God was exaggerating in all points. Maybe he's really not going to give us the land." But the land was good. The report was positive, although sobering.

That moves us, thirdly, to consider their recommendation and this is where the two companies of spies separate in a sense. They could agree in a sense on the report, but the great divide comes in the recommendation. The unbelieving spies say unequivocally, that is with one voice, "We are not able to go up against the people." They've made an assessment and they have determined absolutely, we are not able to go up against the people. Notice similarly, the believing spies say unequivocally, that is with one voice, "Let us go up at once and take possession for we are well able to overcome it." Interesting. Both groups of spies see the same facts. They both make a similar report regarding the facts. They simply interpreted the facts through different grids, through different lenses. The believing spies interpreted the facts through faith and it changed their outlook. The unbelieving spies looked at the same facts through unbelief and it changed their outlook. Somewhat as an aside, this is still the case today when it comes to engaging in anything. In a sense, they were engaging in science as they were evaluating the land. They saw the same facts but the lenses through which they looked colored their interpretation. That's important to remember. We never see bare facts. We always see facts through our interpretive grid.

Sadly, the report of the ten resonated better with the nation of Israel than did the report of the two and the reason is because the Israelites already had cowardly hearts and so the report that it's a good land but we're not able to take it, it resonated with them. So, they responded to that in the fourth phase of this story which we should call the rebellion. Moses uses that very word. He says, "Only do not rebel," verse 9, "do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land." But they do rebel. In fact, they say something that you can hardly imagine, "Perhaps it would be better if we went back to Egypt." Yeah, you mean that place where you were crying day and night because of the hard taskmasters and where your children were dying for being overworked, where there was not enough of everything you needed? You want to go back to that place. You see, their minds are distorted by cowardice. In fact, the Israelites now filled with fear over the prospects of entering Canaan, concoct the unthinkable plan of selecting a leader. You see,

it's not just an idea. It's not just, "Oh, maybe we'd be better off back in Egypt." They're actually formulating a plan. That's when you know someone is serious in their unbelief or in their belief, when they actually concoct a plan to do something. It's not just rumination anymore, it's action.

So, as this plan is sort of being fomented among the people, Joshua and Caleb protest. They saw it as their duty to try to dissuade them from this foolish plan. You read in verse 9, "Do not rebel against the Lord nor fear the people of this land," and what a powerful phrase, "for they are our bread." We're going to eat them up, is what they're saying. "We're going to eat them up. They're our bread. All that they've worked for in developing their cities and cultivating their vines, we're going to consume because their protection has departed from them and the Lord is with us." Do not fear them. But it was too late. Their hearts were filled with fear. The congregation now prepares to stone Joshua and Caleb, to hurl stones upon them until they're dead. Notice how cowardice and rebellion are soul-mates. Their cowardice easily led to their rebellion. Fear promotes disobedience because God says, "Do this," and we say, "No, it's too hard. I'm too scared," and so we rebel and do something different. Cowardice and rebellion are soul-mates.

A fifth phase in this narrative we could call the ruling. God casts his unmistakable judgment against the cowardice that he watches unfold. God's judgment, it's very interesting the way he communicates this judgment. He does so in a way that we could picture by concentric circles. Concentric circles are circles that share the same center so you've got a small circle that has a center, you've got a larger circle that shares a center, you've got a larger circle so there is overlap but they all share the same point. The same point is God's judgment but at the center of that judgment are the ten spies. You could put it this way: they're like in the bull's-eye of God's judgment. So, we read in verse 37 of Numbers 14, they die on the spot. They're struck by a plague and they're dead right then and there for instigating the cowardice that they brought back with their recommendation.

You move out of it, sort of moving away from the epicenter of the earthquake, so to speak. You've got the entire older generation, all of those 20 and older, they're going to suffer because of their leaders. They'll all die in the wilderness. They'll go on this wandering and they've seen the Promised Land for the last time looking from the outside in. Then on the furthest ring of these concentric circles, farther from the epicenter, even the young people suffer. That's very interesting. They still have to wander through the desert for 40 years before they go into the Promised Land. Now, do you see the irony in that? The people said, "We cannot go into this land. We cannot attack the Canaanites. Our young people will suffer. Our children will be consumed." Now God says, "Because of your cowardice, you're going to bring pain on your young people and cause them to wander for 40 years. They will see the land, you won't but they're going to suffer for your sin."

This is a story that as we move to consider the sin, I want to remind us of important detail: this great sin with its concentric circles of punishment was birthed by the leaders of the people. Did you catch that in Numbers 13:1-2? "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of

Israel.” What, by lot? By sort of luck of the draw? At random? Just pick a leader? Pick a person? No, he says, “From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a,” what? “Leader among them.” These were the chief men. These were the leaders. These were the influencers. The fact that the best men of Israel, at least ostensibly, that the best men of Israel succumbed to this kind of cowardice should make us wake up and say, “Is it not possible for me to fall? Should I not take heed?” These weren't just your average Joes, these were the leaders so God would say to us, “Take heed lest you fall considering that the leaders of Israel here fell.”

That's the story and we want to secondly consider the sin, the sin of cowardice. The first way that we'd like to consider the sin is by reflecting a bit on the danger of cowardice. The danger of cowardice. We could say a lot of things here but I want to just focus on two things: cowardice is highly influential. Highly influential. Someone will work out the math quicker than I'm able to but ten men swayed the destiny of a nation of two million. That's highly influential. Each spy represented and spoke for his tribe. He wasn't just responsible to go out and spy out the land and bring back a report, he's speaking for them. He's leading them. He's influencing them. He's casting a vision for them. Now, in this case, it was a very small, cowardly, shrunken vision but they're casting a vision nonetheless.

Make no mistake, the people felt it. Deuteronomy 1:28, the people admit that the spies, here's the admission, “they discouraged our hearts.” They discouraged our hearts with their report. That's a sobering thing for leaders to hear. It implies, at least, that there was some willingness on the part of the people to go up into the land but the ten spies discouraged them. Their leadership was negative and it crushed their courage. Listen, the same is true today, isn't it? We still speak for our tribes. We still influence our people. Church officers set the pace for the church. Church officers contribute to a church culture. Certainly, it's possible for a church to develop a culture that differs greatly from the direction and the leadership and the convictions of the leaders but we ought not to expect that. Church leaders set the pace for the church. Fathers also set the pace for their families. Fathers who are afraid to pray, afraid to weep, afraid to work hard, afraid to whatever, they're leading their families in that way. They're setting pace. They're creating a culture. Fear is highly influential. The same for children. Older siblings are setting the pace for younger siblings. Like it or not, they're looking up to you saying, “How did he get through life? How did she work through these difficulties?” And cowardice can be extremely influential. Don't forget that those who inspired cowardice were more influential, were more influential and were judged more severely.

So, one of the dangers of fear: it is highly influential. Highly influential. A second danger of fear is that it's hellish. Cowardice is hellish. Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death.” This is what God is setting before us. Listen, this is very simple: courage comes from heaven, cowardice comes from hell. Cowardice is hellish. It not only reflects the character of the father of hell, the devil, but it also leads to hell. Cowards go to hell. Those who fear man more than the God who can cast someone into hell, end up in hell.

Cowardice comes from hell. It's a great danger, friends. Please, listen to this plea: cowardice is not something that we can ignore. It's not something peripheral, it's right at the center of life in terms of how we wrestle with it.

So, first of all as we consider the sin, we know it's danger. Secondly, we need to know the difficulty of diagnosing fear and what I mean by this is there is a great stigma connected with cowardice and because of the stigma, cowardice is about the last sin that we own. It's about the last sin that we'll admit to. Have you ever noticed that? Men will admit to being prideful. Men will admit to being angry. Have you ever heard a man admit to being a coward? It's kind of rare because of the stigma attached with fear. No one wants to be a coward. No one wants to be a wimp. No one wants to be fearful. So, we have difficulty diagnosing the cowardice in our own lives. Instead, we repaint cowardice with different colors, with different terms, with different concepts, making it look more palatable.

So, a church, for example, that hoards money says they're being prudent. Well, that sounds pretty good. Who wouldn't want a church that's being prudent? But it could be cowardice. It could be fear of spending the resources that God has given. Someone who says, "I'm not gifted in witnessing." Have you ever said that? They might just be justifying fear. It's really not about your giftedness, you're scared. You're afraid. You're unwilling. You're rebelling because of your fear. A young person does drugs for the first time to avoid being identified as a goody two-shoes. No, it's cowardice. You're afraid to look different and so you give in but it's cowardice, it's fear. A man defends his refusal to lead his family in God's ways by saying, "Well, can't be overbearing. I can't impose my will on the family. Can't exercise leadership." Not today, of course, maybe there was a day in which a man could lead his family but not today. Those days are gone.

It's very difficult to diagnose cowardice, at least, in ourselves because no one wants to be a coward. So, friends, what we need to do is ask ourselves this question: where is fear preventing faithfulness in your life? If you're taking notes, jot that down. If you're listening, repeat that in your own mind. Where is fear preventing greater faithfulness in your life? In my life? Where are we rebelling against God? Where are we refusing to be creative and courageous and bold and being willing to separate from the crowd, do what's difficult because we're scared? Identify those things. We'll come back to that more in a moment.

So, cowardice is very difficult to diagnose. Let me help though, with God's help, by identifying thirdly some distinguishing marks of cowardice. Do you want to diagnose cowardice? Here are two distinguishing marks of cowardice: 1. A fear of man. A fear of man. Great intimidation about what others think of us and when we put it into the terms of Numbers 13-14, it begins to take on a very ugly and stupid character. Listen: the Israelites feared the men of Canaan more than the God of heaven. The unbelieving spies said this, "There we saw giants and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight and so we were in their sight." Oh yeah? Grasshoppers in the sight of the Canaanites? What about in the sight of God? Forget about grasshoppers, how do you measure up to God? You see, they forgot how they looked in God's sight. They forgot that God wasn't just a giant man.



They were afraid of giants, forget about the giants, just forget about the giants and think about God for a minute. You see, it's a fear of man. That's a distinguishing mark of cowardice. Cowards fear man more than God. They see man's weakness in themselves and not God's strength for themselves.

So, one distinguishing mark: fear of man. A second distinguishing mark of cowardice is a false sense of reality. With all due respect because we've all been there before, cowards are not seeing the world properly. They've got such thick glasses of fear over them. They can't see things accurately. Listen to this: God had promised through Moses after the Red Sea crossing that the people of Canaan, the people whose land God was giving them, that the people will hear and be afraid. That's God's promise. The unbelieving Israelites look at the Canaanites and say, "We look like grasshoppers in their eyes." God says, "That's nonsense. They're shaking in their boots over you. They're gripped with fear. Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants," I'm reading from Exodus 15:14-16. "Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants. The chiefs will be dismayed. The mighty men, trembling will take hold of them. All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them." I'm not adding anything here. This is what God is saying. "By the greatness of your arm, they will be as still as a stone." Do you want a reality check? When these spies ran with their tails tucked between their legs back to the camp of the Israelites, the Canaanites upon whom they were spying were shaking in their boots. But they couldn't see it. All they saw was their size, the size of their enemies and the relative smallness of themselves.

In fact, we've already looked at this but we know this was the case. Numbers 22:4. When the Israelites actually prepared to enter the land a second time now, some 40 years later, the King of Moab as we considered earlier said, "This company will lick up everything around us as an ox licks up the grass of the field." Now, there's an interesting poetical play on words here, isn't there? The Moabites say the Israelites are coming and they're going to consume us. They're going to lick up everything like an ox eats up the grass. What did the unbelieving Israelites say that they were like in the face of the Canaanites? Grasshoppers. In Egypt, God showed them what grasshoppers can do.

The point is here: these unbelievers had a false sense of reality. They were gripped by cowardice and, friends, in times like these, it is necessary for us to get out of ourselves, get back to the word of God. What does Scripture say about this problem? What you're thinking is, "This marriage is ruined. There is no hope for recovery." God says, "There is great hope." What we see when we look into a situation is that "my son or my daughter is gone." No hope. God says, "There's great hope." We need to get back to the real reality which is the word of God and sometimes to get there we need to get the help of somebody else, someone who can think more clearly, someone whose head isn't in the fog of cowardice. Go to someone and say, "Help me think through this. I can't see properly. All I see is these huge Canaanites. I feel like a grasshopper."

Hebrews 10:39, though, helps us to transition to our final point. Hebrews 10:39 says, "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition. We are not those," as one other translation says, "who shrink back." We're not. We're not because we follow the King of

courage. We follow the King of kings, the Lord of lords. We're not those who shrink back. But how is that so? It's only so when we close with Christ. That's where we're going to wrap up now. Two points with regard to this text pointing us to Jesus Christ and the first is this: Christ faced our enemies with courage. This is one of the emphases of this story. These folks had the opportunity to face their enemies with courage and they failed. By their failure, they're pointing us to a greater Israel. Not one who shrinks back and is destroyed but one who conquers.

Listen to this, from Deuteronomy 1:29-31. This is after Moses had tried to rally the people's hearts after the spies had discouraged them. He says this, "Do not be afraid of them. You saw how the Lord your God carried you as a man carries his son." All the way that you went until you came to this place. Look, we've been carried. The wicked of man carries his son. Ever since we left Egypt. Now, who is he talking about there? He's talking about Christ. Yes, he's talking about Israel but in the New Testament, God confirms that Israel is a type of his dear Son Jesus Christ. Matthew 2:15 quotes from Hosea 11:1 where God says, "Out of Israel I have called my Son." Not just his people but *the* person, Jesus Christ. This narrative is pointing us to Jesus whom the Father carried even as Christ went through the valley of the shadow of death, he was carried by his loving Father. Because of this, Christ set his face to Jerusalem. He set his face to that place where he would be berated and hurt and mocked and killed, where his Father would project toward him the displeasure that he has towards sinners.

But even on the cross, where Christ seems to be abandoned by God, he can say this, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." The Father called his Son out of Egypt, carrying him as a father carries his son and when Jesus says, "Into your hands, Father, I commit my spirit," he's quoting from Psalm 31:5 and if you have a chance later to look up Psalm 31:5 you'll see that David here confesses his confidence in God as his fortress against powerful adversity. David in that Psalm is faced with great obstacles, some of which are very similar to some of the obstacles that you're facing right now and David says, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." Words that are fulfilled by Christ on the cross, dying for us, when he says, "Into your hands, Father, I commit my spirit." Christ is your champion.

On that day, in that rebellion, Israel had no champion, no visible champion that would go up and sway the people and march upon Canaan and take the land but it was pointing to Jesus Christ. Trust in him and you will not be one of those who shrinks back to perdition, who follows a cowardly path to hell. Christ faced our enemies with courage for us. Secondly, Christ infuses his people with courage. You see, Christ is not just a champion outside of us who conquers our enemies who are too great for us, in whose eyes we appear as grasshoppers, he also infuses us with courage. His Holy Spirit replaces fear with faith.

There is this wonderful passage in Haggai 2 where God is motivating his people to work for his glory in the face of difficult odds. Haggai 2 reflects the period which is also recorded by Ezra and Nehemiah where the Israelites were sent out of captivity back to Israel to rebuild the temple. What does that remind you of? Numbers 13-14? Where

God's people are sent out of captivity into God's land to build the land. And you'll recall from Ezra and Nehemiah that this building effort would be confronted with great resistance by God's enemies. Sanballat, Tobiah, others, they weren't going to let the Israelites come in and just rebuild the walls any more than the Canaanites in Numbers 13-14 were going to allow Israel to waltz in and take the country. They were going to fight. It was going to be painful. But God at that point came to his people with this encouragement, "Be strong and work for I am with you says the Lord of Hosts, according to the word," listen, "that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. So my spirit remains among you. Do not," what? "Fear." God says, "I've done this before. I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. I said I'd be with you. I said I would give you the land and after one failed attempt on your part, I gave you the land. Remember that. Now you're in a similar position, rebuilding these walls in the face of great adversity. Remember, I covenanted with you to be with you so my spirit remains among you. Do not fear."

Friends, we're in a better position because those words "my spirit remains among you, do not fear" was fulfilled at Pentecost. God poured out his spirit, that spirit of faithfulness, of courage, that heavenly spirit. Not a hellish spirit of cowardice, but a heavenly spirit of courage poured out on his people to the extent that believers who had previously cowered in an upper room out of fear of their enemies now stormed the streets of Jerusalem proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Truly, truly, God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind," 2 Timothy 1:7.

As we wrap up, what does this mean for you? What does this mean for me? Let me set three things before us: 1. Identify your fears. Name your fears. What is it that's keeping you from being more faithful because of cowardice? Take a moment and do that right now. Maybe it's easy. Maybe as soon as I said "name your fears" a thought popped into your head, "I know what that is." Maybe you'll think about it later today. Maybe you'll think about it later this week. Name your fear.

Secondly, believe the gospel promise. You say, "Well, that's real new. That's real novel, Pastor. Is this the best you can do to wrap up a sermon? Believe the gospel?" Believe the gospel. Believe that God stands behind those who are washed with the blood of his Son. Is the Father going to turn back on those who are covered with the blood of his dear Son? No, he stands behind them. He holds in his hand. He supports them. Believe that your God is greater than your enemies. Believe that your enemies are as grasshoppers in the sight of your God.

Thirdly, for God's sake, step out of your comfort zone. For God's sake. It's going to be scary. It's going to be uncomfortable but for God's sake, for the sake of his glory, for the sake of his kingdom, for the sake of his fear, step out of your comfort zone. Honor God with courage and with trust and Scripture tells us that if you do, be prepared. Be prepared to be amazed at a life lived out of courageous, unshrinking confidence in the God of heaven. Be prepared for that. It's a promise, "I'll be with you and I'll amaze you with the courage that I'll give you and the foes that we'll conquer together."

Let's pray.

*God, we confess our cowardice. We confess that our cowardice has gotten in the way of so many of our intentions, so many of our good goals. We pray that it would do so no longer. Not because we've pulled up our boots or stiffened our lips but because we're relying upon the Holy Spirit. We're trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Strengthen us. Forgive us and resolve us to be conquerors through the blood of Christ until we reach that glorious goal, not the land of Canaan, but the land of heavenly, eternal, perfect rest. Amen.*