

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 20, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 17, 3:4, 429, 437, 52.

Lessons: Psalm 37:1-13, Romans 6:3-11, Matthew 5:20-26.

Sermon Text: Numbers 14:1-9.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When God called Abraham to leave his country, people and his family, he gave him the promise that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants. He said: *"To your offspring I will give this land."* Gen. 12:7 The Lord's time to fulfill this promise had finally come hundreds of years later when he led his chosen people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. After spending nearly a year at Mt. Sinai where the written Law was given, the Lord told the Israelites: *"see, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to their descendants after them."* Deut. 1:8

The Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the journey from Mt. Sinai to the land of Canaan takes 11 days. (ch. 1:2) Why, then, did it take nearly 40 years more before the Israelites finally entered the promised land? And why was it that out of the nearly two million people who left Egypt, only two men entered the promised land? The Book of Hebrews gives us the answer: *"Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief."* Hebr. 3:17-19 The people did not trust in the Lord. They did not take God at his word when he said he would give them the land of Canaan.

We, too, are called upon to put our trust in the Lord all through our earthly life. If we are to have God's blessings, it is essential that we take God at his word. Of this we want to learn today from our text under the theme recorded in the Book of Proverbs (3: 5):

**"TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART."**

From our text we learn:

1. **Not to trust in the Lord is unbelief and idolatry and has terrible consequences; and,**
2. **To trust in the Lord against all odds is a part of humble, God-given faith and has blessed consequences.**

The chapter before our text tells about the command of the Lord: *"Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites."* 13:2 Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe, among whom were Caleb and Joshua mentioned in our text. This exploration of the land of Canaan was carried out just a few days after leaving Mt. Sinai when the Israelites had reached the borders of Canaan. For forty days they explored the land. They found it to be a rich land. They said: *"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit."* They had brought along a single cluster of grapes with some other fruit. The grapes were so big and heavy that two men carried them on a pole between them. But the men also reported that the people of the land of Canaan were big and powerful.

Ten of the men sent to explore the land did not trust in the Lord. They told the others: *"We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."* 13:31 They caused the Israelites to be afraid to enter the land.

What Caleb said was not heeded when he told the people: ***"We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."*** 13:30

After the people had listened to both reports, our text records their lack of trust in the Lord: ***"That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' And they said to each other, 'we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.'"*** What a horrible lack of trust in the Lord! These people had heard through the years what the Lord had promised, namely, that the land of Canaan would be given to them. God had brought them out of Egypt, delivered them from their slavery, with a grand display of his almighty power. How they should have rejoiced and praised the Lord for his mercy and his great blessings as they now stood at the borders of the promised land! Instead, they blamed the Lord for bringing them to the promised land, and said the Lord had brought them there to kill them with the sword. They rejected the Lord entirely, and even made plans to go back to Egypt! That was clearly a case of unbelief. They did not trust in the Lord to do what he had promised to Abraham and all their forefathers. They put their trust in themselves. They thought they had a better idea – to go back to Egypt! That was idolatry when they trusted in themselves instead of God. If we trust in anyone or anything before God, or other than God, or more than God, that is idolatry. The Bible says: ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."*** Prov. 3:5 The Bible also says: ***"He who trusts in himself is a fool."*** Prov. 28:26

What fools the unbelieving Israelites were is evident from the terrible consequences of not trusting in the Lord. The Lord told Moses what their punishment would be: ***"As surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert, but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times – not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."*** Num. 14:21-23 Then the Lord told them through Moses that those who were twenty years old and older would all die in the desert. He said: ***"...your bodies will fall in this desert. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert."*** Num. 14:32.33 Those were the terrible consequences of not trusting in the Lord. What will it be when these unbelievers go to hell!

In the second part of our text we have a fine example of what it means to trust in the Lord with all the heart. We learn that to trust in the Lord against all odds is a part of humble, God-given faith and has blessed consequences.

## 2.

Moses and Aaron fell down before all the people with their faces to the ground, humbly asking the Lord to show mercy. Then Joshua and Caleb, two of the ten men who had explored the land, tore their clothes before the whole assembly of Israelites as a sign of their grief over the lack of trust in the Lord. They then expressed their trust in the Lord: ***"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."*** What a fine statement of trust in the Lord! Unfortunately the people did not listen. The words after our text tell us: ***"The whole assembly talked about stoning them."*** v. 10 Then the glory of the Lord was revealed and the Lord told Moses of the terrible punishment he would bring upon the unbelieving Israelites.

Let us consider what it meant for Caleb and Joshua to speak so confidently of the Lord's help. There was no doubt about it, the land of Canaan was populated with a powerful people, who, humanly speaking, could easily overcome Israel. Yet, Caleb and Joshua said, ***"Do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up."*** They were not trusting in themselves or in man's power, but they said: ***"The Lord is with us."*** Against all odds, against overwhelming numbers of the enemy, they believed the Lord could conquer the land and give it to them, as he had promised. Trusting the Lord, Caleb and Joshua said of the enemy in Canaan: ***"Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us."*** The protection the enemy trusted in would be

taken from them. This was God's plan all along. He had promised Israel: ***"I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory..."*** Ex. 34:24 God said he would get rid of the heathen people in Canaan and clean out the land for his chosen people of Israel. The sin of the heathen with all their idolatry and immorality had reached its full measure, and the Lord would now punish them by driving them out of the land of Canaan.

This was the promise of the Lord in which Caleb and Joshua put their trust. That is an example of humble, God-given faith. Such trust only God can create in the heart of people. Remember, it is the same Word of God which states the promises of God in the glorious Gospel of Christ, the promise of sins forgiven and eternal life in Christ. That Gospel Word is also powerful to work the faith to believe the promises. St. Paul says of the power of the Lord in the Word: ***"That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead."*** Eph. 1:20 How important it is for us to hear that Gospel of Christ, for it is the means of grace to create, strengthen and sustain our faith!

Let us hear what the Bible says about such trust in the Lord when we take God at his word and believe his promises. And let us hear from God's Word of the blessed consequences of trusting in the Lord. David wrote: ***"Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. ... For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land."*** Ps. 37:3-9 Another psalm says: ***"Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you."*** 84:12

At all times in our lives, under all circumstances, we should put our trust in the Lord. Psalm 91 says: ***"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" v. 1-2*** Think of Hezekiah, king of Judah. When he was sick unto death, he trusted in the Lord and prayed, and the Lord added 15 years to his life. (Is. 38) When we are sick the Lord can either take the sickness away, or in any event, he will always make it work out for our spiritual good. Think of Martin Luther when he fought against the evils of the Church of Rome during the Reformation years. He was admonished again and again at the Diet of Worms to give up his convictions, but he stood boldly and confidently because he put his trust in the Lord. Oh yes, he ended up outside the Church of Rome, but with the pure Gospel, and we are heirs of this Reformation blessing! When we, then, experience evil days in the work of the Church and we wonder what the future holds for us, let us say with the psalmist: ***"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?"*** Ps. 56:3.4

So, we have learned, as the Book of Jeremiah says: ***"Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. ... But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him."*** 17:5.7 Above all, no matter what happens in our life, let us trust in Jesus, our glorious and ever-living Lord and Redeemer, for in him we have everlasting life in heaven. Amen.

Preached July 26, 1981

Edited by Robert Mehlretter