

January 10, 2010 by Steve Brandon



Examine Your Hearts

Hebrews 3:14-19

1. Are You Holding Fast? (verse 14).

2. Are You Believing? (verses 15-19)

Without a doubt, the single most important turning point in my life came in the summer of 1988. It was then that I attended a Bible-teaching church for the first time. For the first time in my life, I heard the Bible opened and explained in such a way that I could go home from a Sunday worship, look at the text and say, "Yep, there it is. I see it. It's exactly like what was said on Sunday morning." The effect upon my soul was great.

And then, the big impact came on July 10th, 1988. The church held an old fashioned tent meeting. They rented a tent and had a few open-air services. They had asked John MacArthur to come and speak. I had sort of heard of John MacArthur before on the radio, but didn't really know much about him. He spoke about the new book that he had written, entitled, "The Gospel According to Jesus." The main premise of the book is that Jesus doesn't merely call us to make a decision to believe in Christ. Even the demons believe (James 2:19). Rather, Jesus calls us to abandon our lives completely, and to follow Him all of our days.

Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a man, who found a treasure hidden in the field. From joy of his find, "He goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44). When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, seeking eternal life, Jesus didn't say, "Pray this prayer." Rather, Jesus told him to abandon His riches, which He was unwilling to do (Matthew 19:21). Jesus called people to "repent", that is, to turn from the wicked ways, believe, and follow Him (Matt. 4:17; Luke 19:10).

It's not that you are saved by works. It's not that you are saved by following Jesus. We are saved by faith, but that faith will express itself in love for God. That faith will express itself in abandoning all to follow Jesus.

Anyway, that evening, when John MacArthur spoke, he opened up the words of Jesus that are given in the Sermon on the Mount. He talked about the narrow gate (Matt. 7:13). He talked about how few there are who find the narrow gate (Matt. 7:14), because it's a hard and restricted way. Working through the passage, he eventually came to these words of Jesus.

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

John MacArthur then explained how these are some of the most terrifying words in all of the New Testament. Here you have many people who are standing before Jesus on the judgment day, pleading with Him to let them into the kingdom of heaven. But, Jesus turned them away. Jesus turned away those who were calling upon His name. They weren't calling upon the name of Buddha or Mohammed. Rather, they were calling upon the name of Jesus. They had heard about Jesus. They thought that they were followers of Jesus. They had done some amazing things in the name of Jesus. But, in the end, Jesus reveals that they were not His disciples. "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23).

Here were people expecting heaven, but instead, received hell. They were expecting to live with Jesus forever, but instead, they were cast out of Jesus' presence. When I heard these words as a 21 year old college student, I was shocked. I had never heard anything like this before. I grew up in church and had been taught of the importance of believing in Jesus, to be sure. But, the emphasis wasn't so much upon a pattern of life that was consistent with one's beliefs about Jesus. The emphasis wasn't upon the fruit of our lives to see the reality of our lives. Rather, the emphasis was upon your profession of faith. As long as you said that you believed, you were OK.

Hearing such things had a profound effect upon my soul. It gave me a passion to know Christ. It gave me a passion for His word. It gave me a passion to avoid hearing those words, "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matt. 7:21). But, beyond this, it also had an effect upon the way that I looked upon other professing Christians.

My early years in college were spent thinking that all who professed faith in Christ at one time would be saved in the end, and would enjoy the glories of heaven together with all the saints. But, through the clear explanation of Scripture after Scripture after Scripture, I came to see that all who profess to be Christians are not necessarily genuine followers of Christ. Nor will they enter the kingdom of heaven in that final day. There are many who are deluded into thinking that their souls are safe in Jesus, when, in fact, they are on the precipice of hell. They have a name that they are alive, they call themselves believers in Christ, but, in fact, they are dead and unbelieving (Rev. 3:1). What's important isn't their "decision" that they made to follow Christ. Rather, the important thing is to see how their "decision" to follow Jesus works itself out in love and obedience to God.

I began to see that there were many around me who at one time professed a faith in Christ, but were adrift in their faith. They manifested no love for God. They displayed no passion for Christ. They had no desire for Christian fellowship. They were living in the lusts of their flesh. They had hard hearts. Whereas once I would have seen these people as safe from damnation (because, at one time, they had expressed their faith in Christ), I began to see them in a different light. I began to see them as lost and in danger and in need of a Savior. They needed to get right with God. They needed to look at their hearts and examine them and come to faith in Christ.

My heart for all of you here this morning is that you wouldn't be like this, deluded into thinking that your soul is secure because of some past prayer you prayed. Rather, my heart for all of you is that you would have a real faith. I'm all into prayers. I'm all into people seeking the Lord. But, let us know that genuine faith will display itself in your life. My heart is that you would have a faith that continues until the end. That's the point of our text this morning.

Do you have a faith in Christ? Do you have a persevering faith? Are you pressing on in your fight to believe? In other words, I want for you this morning to examine your hearts. Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning, "Examine Your Hearts." If you haven't done so, I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, chapter 3.

In recent weeks, in the book of Hebrews, we have focused our attention upon our hearts. Two weeks ago, my exhortation to you was simply this: "Don't Harden Your Hearts." That exhortation comes in verse 8, "Do not harden your hearts." We looked at the nation of Israel and saw how their hearts were hard. They had seen the miracles of the plagues, but were unbelievers in God's care for them. The summons for us is that we wouldn't have such a heart.

Last week, my exhortation to you was "Care for your hearts" That exhortation comes in verse 12, "Take care brethren, that there not be in any one of you an unbelieving heart." We are all susceptible to a wandering heart. We need to be aware of our disease. We need to practice the cure. And the cure is mutual encouragement one to another, as it says there in verse 13, "Encourage one another."

Continuing on the same theme, my exhortation to you this week is to "Examine your hearts." Just as physical checkups are good for your physical hearts, so also spiritual checkups are good for your spiritual hearts. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul wrote, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?" And this is what I want for you to do this morning. I want for you to test yourself. I want for you to examine yourself. I want for you to see if you are in the faith. In other words, I want for you to enter into the doctor's office and submit yourself to a variety of tests to check on the health of your spiritual heart.

By way of outline, I have two tests for you to undergo. Each of them come in the form of a question. Question #1, ...

1. Are You Holding Fast? (verse 14).

Are you holding fast? Look there at verse 14, ...

Hebrews 3:14

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.

The call of verse 14 is that we "hold fast" until the end. The idea here is that we have a death-grip, which we aren't letting go of until the final day.

Have you ever seen trapeze artists do their flips high above the ground? They grab each other with a death grip. My hand grasping your wrist; your hand grasping my wrist. We're not letting go, lest you fall to the ground. That's the idea here. We have found Jesus Christ to be our all and all. All of our eggs are in this basket. We will hold onto it until the day that we die. Is this where you have your grip? Are you holding fast to the gospel? That's what it's talking about here in verse 14. In the New American Standard, it says here that we are to hold fast "our assurance." The NIV says we should hold fast "the confidence we had." The ESV says that we must hold fast "our original confidence." I like how the Message translates this phrase, "We keep our grip on the sure thing we started out with."

The original readers had heard of Jesus. They had heard that He was their Messiah, come into the flesh. They had heard about His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. In some measure, they had come to embrace these things. And the writer tells us to "hold fast" to these things. Grip it with both of your hands. Don't hold on with one hand, while grasping at something else with your other hand. Don't hold onto the gospel with one hand and hold onto your works with your other hand. That doesn't work.

In the days of the Old Testament, God had promised refuge to those who would enter the tent of the LORD and hold to the horns of the altar (Ex 2:14). When Solomon became king, he was cleaning house of all those who weren't faithful to him. When Joab heard this, he ran into the tent of the LORD, and held on to the horns of the altar. Beniah, the minister of justice, came for him and called Joab to come out. But Joab said, "No, for I will die here." So do we have need to hold on to Christ, and say, "I will not let go. I will die here."

Our refuge is the cross of Christ. No one ever perished at the foot of the cross. But, to let go of the cross places our souls in danger.

The original hearers were tempted to let go with one of their hands and cling to the Jewish festivals and sacrifices that they had abandoned in coming to Christ. But, the writer says no, it's our original hope that we need to cling to, and we need to hold on to it tightly. It's the original message of hope that we heard in Christ that we need to cling to.

It's no wonder that Paul delivered the gospel to the Corinthians "as first importance" (1 Cor. 15:3). Those in Corinth embraced Jesus, who died for our sins according to the Scriptures, who was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Paul said, "[this is] the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word

which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1-2). As Paul preached to those in Corinth, he placed a high priority on continuing in the faith, firm until the end. The first message they heard was to be the message that they held on to.

And, we see the same things herein Hebrews 3: "if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end" (verse 14). That is, until the end of our lives or until Christ comes back. As long as we have breath, this is what we need to cling to.

So, how's your grip? Are you clinging to Christ, and Him alone. Or, is your grip loosening. Are you confident that you are holding on, with both hands, never to let go? Endurance until the end is what's important. This is just one of many such exhortations in the book of Hebrews. If any book of the Bible teaches the need to persevere in your faith, it is the book of Hebrews.

I want to take you on a survey of the many passages that call us to this sort of clinging until the end. Consider the flavor of exhortations in the book of Hebrews.

Heb. 2:1 - "We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it."
In other words, we must continue to believe the message we have heard about the Messiah. We must not drift from our faith.

Heb. 3:12 - "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God"
In other words, we need believing hearts. We need hearts of faith that don't fall away.

Heb. 4:1 - "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it."
In other words, we need to believe the promises offered to us by God, the promises of rest in God. And, we need to press on, so that we don't come short.

Heb. 4:11 - "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall."
In other words, make efforts to believe the promises that God. Don't fall short of them.

Heb. 6:1 - "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity."
In other words, we can't merely rest upon what we have learned, thinking that we are OK. Rather, we are to press on in our faith. We are to press on to maturity.

Heb. 6:11-12 - "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end. So that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience will inherit the promises."
In other words, we are to show a diligence in arriving at our hope. Our hope comes through faith and patience, through a believing and waiting heart. We aren't merely to rest on our profession of faith made some time ago, so as to become a spiritual sluggard. Rather, we are to make efforts to believe and press on.

Heb. 10:35-36 - "Therefore, do not throw away our confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised."
In other words, your confidence in faith has a great reward for you. And, you need to endure, so that you may receive that reward.

Heb. 10:39 - "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."
In other words, there's a profession of faith that shrinks back, and there's a profession of faith that preserves the soul.

Chapter 11 is filled with examples of the sort of faith to which we are called. It's an active, obedient faith. It's the faith of Abel, who offered to God an acceptable sacrifice (11:4). It's the faith of Enoch, who walked with God (11:5). It's the faith of Noah, who built the ark, believing God that a flood would be coming (11:6). It's the faith of Abraham, who left his country, and offered up his only son, even though he didn't know the outcomes of such matters before God (11:8, 17). It's the faith of Moses, who considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (11:26). And in verse 32, the writer continues on, ...

Hebrews 11:32-40

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

These are models for us of what genuine faith looks like. It experiences great victories, like conquering kingdoms and shutting mouths of

lions. It endures through great persecutions, like mockings and scourgings and prison and martyrdom. It trusts in Jesus, firm until the end.

And then, the call comes in chapter 12, verses one and two. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

In other words, we have many, many who have gone before us and lived lives of persevering faith. Let us also, follow their example and live in the same manner as they did - by faith.

Heb. 12:3, "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

In other words, let us not falter in our faith. But, let us continue in steadfastness of hope. Let us press on! That's genuine faith!

Heb. 12:15, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God."

In other words, grace is there to grasp. Don't come short. But, take hold of the grace that is there.

Heb. 12:25, "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking."

In other words, God has told us what to believe and how to live. Let us not refuse Him. Rather, let us walk by faith in Him.

The call of the book of Hebrews is the call to persevering faith. The exhortation of the book is to believe in Jesus, draw near to Jesus, hold fast to Jesus, and press on in following Him. Nowhere in Hebrews do you ever find assurance given to those who merely had a professed faith in Christ. Rather, the call is for us to continue on our pursuit of the Lord. Those souls that merely professed a faith and have abandoned it are in danger of coming short of the grace of God (12:15). Their souls are in danger of falling in the end.

And this morning, I'm asking you, "Are you holding fast?" Is Jesus Christ your only hope? Are you clinging to Him? This isn't the only time in the book of Hebrews that we are called to "hold fast" to Jesus. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 23 tells us to "hold fast," as does chapter 4, verse 14. Do you sing, ... "You are my life, O precious Christ. You are to me the pearl of greatest price. My love for You will never die. Jesus, You are my life. I come to You; I run to You. There's no greater joy than knowing You"? Do you pray, "O Holy Fire, love's present light, burn all desires 'til You are my one delight"? Do you say, "I know that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. Jesus has shed His blood for me. I claim His blood for me"?

We haven't dealt with the first portion of verse 14, which says, "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." You need to pay close attention here to the tenses of verbs in this verse. It says that our perseverance is the evidence that we have become partakers of Christ. Our perseverance doesn't earn us anything. It's not meritorious. It won't result in our final salvation. Rather, our perseverance is an indication of our salvation.

Do you see it? The verse doesn't say, "We will become partakers of Christ if we hold fast until the end." Rather, it says, "holding fast until the end demonstrates that we are indeed, now, partakers of Christ." We have become partakers of Christ when we heard the gospel and believed. God made us new and has joined us with Him.

The same thing was said back in chapter 3, verse 6, "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." In other words, today we are His house - His church - if we continue in our hope, firm until the end. Endurance until the end shows our sharing Christ today.

Enduring faith demonstrates genuine faith. Such an understanding of saving faith is throughout the Bible.

Paul said it this way in Colossians. Listen closely. "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach - if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister (Col 1:21-23).

Do you see it? You have been reconciled if indeed you continue in the faith. The demonstration that you have received Christ is if you continue on in Christ.

This is the heart of what Jesus said, in Matthew 7. "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits (Matt. 7:16-20).

Oh, there may be many who look like they have it for a time. But, if it doesn't endure, the heart hasn't been changed. When the seed was sown among the four soils, three of the soils sprouted up. The seed sprouted on the rocky soil, the thorny soil, and the good soil. But, though there were signs of life in the rocky and thorny soil - they sprouted up, receiving the word with joy - what was most important? It was how they continued. It was how they ended. The seed in the rocky soil has no root, so when affliction or persecution arises, he falls away (Matt. 13:20-21). The seed in the thorny soil has no room to grow. The worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it out, so that it becomes unfruitful (Matt. 13:22). It's the seed upon the good soil that continued on until it bore fruit (Matt. 13:23).

Are you holding fast? It's not how you start, it's how you finish that's important. And this is good news, because you still have an opportunity to hold fast your assurance firm until the end. In fact, that's where the writer to the Hebrews goes next in our text. He's going to talk about "today." Look there in verse 15.

Hebrews 3:15-19

While it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me." For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

My second question for you in the examination room comes from the final verse, verse 19. In that verse, we see that the Israelites were not able to enter because of their unbelief. The first test came in verse 14: Are You Holding Fast? The second test is here in verses 15-19, ...
2. Are You Believing? (verses 15-19)

Now, in verse 15, the writer takes us back to verse 7, where he quoted from Psalm 95. He quotes the first section of what he quoted previously, and then, he begins to explain the verses. I love this, because it's one of those rare instances in the New Testament, where the Old Testament is quoted and then picked apart and explained and applied. It's what I attempt to do each week as I open the Scripture for all of you. I work hard to read the text, explain the text, and apply the text. And that's what he does here. In verses 16, 17, and 18, he asks three questions. And then, he answers those questions. Finally, in verse 19, he draws a conclusion from his question.

Look there in verse 16 for question number one: "For who provoked Him when they had heard?" He picks up this word, "provoked" from verse 15. And says, "Who did this?" The answer then comes at the end of verse 16, by way of rhetorical question: "Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?" The answer is that everyone provoked the Lord. It's everyone that saw and witnessed the marvelous miracles of the Lord.

And then, in verse 17, we have the next question: "And with whom was He angry for forty years?" The writer gets the see of this question from verses 9 and 10 above, where Psalm 95 speaks about God's anger with the generation, and how they saw His works for forty years. The answer comes at the end of verse 17: "Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?" God was angry with those Israelites who sinned, by provoking the Lord.

In verse 18, we have the third question: "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest?" This question comes from verse 11 above, where God said, "They shall not enter my rest." The answer is in the last half of verse 18: "[Was it not] to those who were disobedient?" It was the disobedient that God prohibited from entering the rest.

Verse 16 establishes who provoked the Lord.

Verse 17 establishes God's anger against them.

Verse 18 established God's decree: "They shall not enter My rest."

And then, the conclusion comes in verse 19, "So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." I do believe that the clear application for us comes in this matter of belief. Or, as I have said, "Are You Believing?" I assume this is the same exhortations as the first question, "Are you holding fast?" Is Jesus Christ your only hope? Are you believing what He told you? Are you clinging to God's Word?

The events to which the writer refers in Hebrews 3:19 come from Numbers, chapter 13 and 14. We will not come back to Hebrews until next week. So, turn back in your Bibles to Numbers 13. This is a story where I want you to see how they were unbelieving. And, I want you to ask yourself if you are unbelieving in the same way. Will God provoke your heart and call you to repentance? Will he call you to be like Caleb and Joshua and not like the other spies?

Numbers 13 finds us with Israel in the wilderness, having been redeemed out of slavery by God. The ten plagues have happened; the pillar of fire has protected them; they have passed through the Red Sea and the Egyptians have been drowned; they had found themselves with bitter water and God made it sweet; they had found themselves without food and God gave them manna. They have just begun their wandering, going straight into the land of Canaan. We find Israel just before they get to Canaan, ...

Numbers 13:1-2

Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them."

Here is the plan: go and spy out the land. I am going to give the land to the twelve tribes of Israel, so take a leader from each of the twelve tribes--twelve guys--to go out and take the land.

Numbers 13:3

So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel.

And, in verses four through sixteen, we see the names of all of the men. Buried deep in there are the names of Joshua and Caleb, who are

the heroes of the story.

Numbers 13:17-20

When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the Negev; then go up into the hill country. "See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. "How is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are they like open camps or with fortifications? "How is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.

Moses wants these men to spy out the land and see what it is like. He has many questions for them. He knows that Israel is to conquer the land, so they must find out everything they can about it.

Numbers 13:21-24

So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, at Lebo-hamath. When they had gone up into the Negev, they came to Hebron where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi, the descendants of Anak were (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) Then they came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two men, with some of the pomegranates and the figs. That place was called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there.

Here we see the men bringing back grapes from Canaan, showing their obedience to Moses.

Numbers 13:25-30

When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. "Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. "Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan." Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it."

In front of all the people of Israel, we see Caleb, the hero, quieting the people, who are doubting Israel's ability to conquer the land. Even though God has promised to give them the land of Canaan, they are doubting. But, Caleb is believing. He is believing what God said: "I'm going to give [the land] to the sons of Israel" (Num 13:7). But, the men grumble in Numbers 13:31, saying "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us."

Numbers 14:1-4

Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! "Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

The Israelites want to impeach Moses, and return to Egypt. They are grumbling and complaining. This is exactly how they have grumbled and complained against God in the past. God has cared for them, He's nourished them and brought them food. The manna is still coming at this time. They are not hungry or thirsty. God is providing for them in a wonderful way. Yet, "all the congregation" (Num. 14:1) and "all the sons of Israel" (Num. 14:2) are grumbling and complaining.

Numbers 14:5-9

Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us - a land which flows with milk and honey. "Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."

Do you see the emphasis on Caleb's faith here? Verse 8 reminds Israel of God's promise: "He will bring us into this land." He reminds them to "not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey." But, in verse 10, they people cry out to stone Caleb and Joshua. Had it not been for God's divine intervention, Joshua and Caleb would have perished. Then, Moses intercedes, ...

Numbers 14:11

The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?

I think rightly, God could come to many of us, and say "How long? How long must I show myself to you? How long before you believe? You have seen others walk in faith and trust the Lord; you have seen Me mightily provide. How long do I need to continue?" God says, ...

Numbers 14:12

"I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you [Moses] into a nation greater and mightier than they." But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. "Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.' "But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.' "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

Here Moses is pleading pardon for his people, Israel, just as Jesus like Jesus pleads pardon for us. God may be angry with us for our sin, and Jesus comes before Him to say, "No, Father, they are believing. They are trusting in me." Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for us. He is always praying for us, pleading His case before God, always making propitiation for our sins. I remember a few weeks ago, we saw in Hebrews 3 how Moses acted like a high priest. Here, he is acting like a high priest, pleading pardon for his people.

Numbers 14:20-24

So the LORD said, "I have pardoned them according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.

I'll have you notice here that the LORD says "ten times" (verse 22). God speaks about the Israelites spurned Him. He's not counting the plagues. So which ten times is He talking about? It's easy to count ten times that Israel has spurned the LORD and complained against Him. They complained about the manna because it was too bland. God instructed them not to pick up the manna on the Sabbath day, but they did pick it up and tried to hoard it, and it went bad; they had spurned the LORD. There was the time they made the golden calf and spurned the LORD. God finally says, "That's enough! No one believes in me, and you are not going to enter the land." It says down in verse 27, ...

Numbers 14:27-38

"How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. 'Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey--I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition. I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.'"

As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land, even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the LORD. But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land.

God speaks of the grumbling and complaining of the congregation. This grumbling and complaining is a manifestation of Israel's unbelief. But, God says, Caleb and Joshua have believed. All of the congregation died because of their unbelief. But, Joshua and Caleb entered the rest because they believed! I just ask you, "Are you believing?" Let us not be duped into thinking that just because we're in church, we are OK. This was the whole congregation of Israel! And, they saw great miracles. Yet, God was not well pleased with them - with all of them except two. So, surely, among us there are some that are not believing.

I just call you to believe and trust. Now, believing and trusting is different for us than it was for the Israelites. We have not had a revelation saying that God is going to give us some land. But, we do have the revelation that Jesus Christ will forgive our sins. Let us cling to that revelation, and let us allow that revelation to work itself out in our lives so that we will live differently and trust Him through these days.

Let us hold fast. Let us believe. If you are not holding fast and not believing, I call you to see the danger of your soul.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 10, 2010 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] You can listen to this message here: <http://www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/1988-07-10%20-%20Who%20Are%20The%20Few.mp3>.