**NUMBERS EXIT RAMP 4 GIANTS IN THE LAND!** \_\_\_\_\_ **Numbers 13-14**

Every top sports competitor knows that the difference between winning and losing comes to what is between the ears. Winning is in the mind before it is on the field, racecourse or the racetrack because the skill difference between people at the top level of their chosen sport is minimal. On their day anyone can win! You just had to watch the north and south rugby match last week to see evidence of how close the difference is between two top teams and the difference might be just a moment of inattention like Djokovic found out last week, or it could be during extra time as was the case last week. You might be amazed to realise that it's no different when it comes to defeating your opposition spiritually in your life – it's how you think and then go on to choose that determines whether or not we go and grow on God's path for our lives or turn off or turn back and lose our way.

We are in the book of Numbers 13 and following the trek of the people as they journey towards this land of promise. A land flowing with milk and honey, fruits and produce. They have left a life of captivity in Egypt and have had their taste of freedom, but freedom has found them wanting. There is discontent in the camp – with the food. Some want to go back to the land of spices and fish, sick of this manna food that comes down overnight each day. Others are discontent with the leadership and the way Moses is leading even with their destination almost within reach. They come to the border of this Promised Land.

Job almost done or just beginning?

Moses is thinking 'job almost done', no more manna, no more lack of water, no more living in tents on the move. This new land is within their grasp; they can smell it, close enough to reach, and so at Gods direction, he picks 12 *leaders* to spy out the land. So Moses says, "Go find out if the land is good, what crops grow there, who the people are, how many of them there are, how strong their cities are, and how well protected they are, also, bring back samples of what grows there. We will wait here". For 40 days they waited then the 12 spies return and give their report – yes it's a bountiful land. Here are some samples of the fruits that grow there…. BUT the overwhelming conclusion was that there are giants in the land, the people living there are many, their towns are fortified and they are too strong for us.

Caleb and a young man called Joshua were the two who said, "We can take this!" They saw God first and then the obstacles second. The other 10 spies disagreed. We will be devoured if we try to take this land and this report spread like wildfire through the people. We are about the size of grasshoppers to them. The ten had a report based on fear and had quickly forgotten the God who had delivered them from Pharaoh and saw only giants who would devour them, the just two remembered God's promise to bring them into a land. Deuteronomy 1 tells us this story happened at a place called Kadeshbarnea.

I want you to remember this name because it is significant in the nation's history. This was a pivotal moment. I wonder whether you, like me, remember your life story in the dates and events that significant things happened. 1968 the day my mother died – I was 15 years old. 1974 the year I went to Bible College. 1976 the year I married, 1989, moved our family to England. The years I spend travelling to globe designing and monitoring projects and partnering churches 1991 – 2001. 2008 I came back into full-time church ministry after years in real estate and property. I'm a numbers and lists kind of person! But here is a date that would live long in the minds of nation. The date they waited at Kadesh Barnea because what happened here resulted in them spending the next 37 years wandering and only two people lived to tell the story.

What else happened at Kadesh Barnea?

The people complained about lack of water and Moses in anger struck the rock and for that, he forfeited leading the people into the land. Here Miriam and Aaron both died; the singer-dancer who had led the procession of praise after the mighty deliverance from Egypt. Moses sister who together with her brother Aaron had criticised Moses and been stuck down with leprosy and Aaron died, leaving the role of High priest to his son Eliezer. But most of all, Kadesh Barnea was a place of choosing whether the people would move on and into the land, or move off into exit ramps of their own choice.

What is your Kadesh Barnea?

As I wrote this message this week, I pondered about our church and wondered if this was again a time in our church when we need to affirm and choose what we want to be and where we want to go? You know the thing about Kadesh is that you don't know you're there until later when you look back and say, that was a pivotal moment, something happened there that determined the next chapter of my life. Last week, I spoke about your life story being your greatest tool or weapon against the enemy. Some years ago, I came very close to losing my way spiritually and emotionally, and I almost lost my marriage. I had to embark upon a major rebuild from the ground up and here's the thing - when I was the closest to losing my way – my antennae didn't warn me! I was oblivious to the real danger I was in until it was almost too late but for the grace of God and the love of family and good friends. You might be at a Kadesh without knowing it, and the significance of where you are for your future might be hidden from you. Yes, there are giants of apathy, and giants of cynicism, and giants of fear, and giants of compromise, and even religious giants that stand tall over us, but here is my message to us today; God can topple all these giants in our lives if we want him to. There are times when we come right to the brink of moving into something new God has for us, and we have to choose to embrace it or pull back and allow the giants to win. The future, though it possessed all the plenty that God promised had to be fought for. It would not come to them on a plate. Every metre of it had to be won and occupied. And so it is with us. None of it will happen without hard focussed work by a passionate people.

And the difference? Is what is between your ears (thinking) and what's in your heart (what you truly value). Last week, I shared with you the message from Numbers 13….about leadership and not turning back. We have seen three exit ramps and today's fourth exit ramp is right here from this passage. Exit Ramp No 1,2,3 *I will live to feel better. Life is hard I am entitled to find relief.*  *I live to satisfy my deepest needs the way I want to.* *I need to be respected, heard and honoured as I deserve.* Today here is the fourth Exit Ramp: 4 "*I see many obstacles (giants) ahead which stand in the way of me enjoying what God has promised! So many that I think I will turn back."*

The 7 Buts!

In chapters 13 & 14 I counted *7 Buts!* And they tell the story of the interplay between faith and rebellion.

13:28 *But the people there are too strong for us* (the ten leaders)

13:30 *But Caleb tried to quieten the people* – we can certainly conquer it

14:10 *But the whole community spoke of stoning Caleb* and Joshua

14:13 *But Moses objected* and interceded for the people before God

14:24 *But Caleb my servant will be spared* – consequences 40 years

14:41 *But Moses warned the people* not to go into the land

14:44 *But the people defiantly pushed ahead* and were soundly defeated. The story is tossed to and fro by the few people of faith and the overwhelming majority who want to return to Egypt or go into the land despite Moses warning.

Life Application

So what does this look like today in our lives? Allowing the giants to determine your future is a common exit ramp and catches many people on the path of God because we focus on the problems and obstacles and not the promises of what God has said. There must be an easier pathway we say to ourselves. Surely God doesn't intend for me to live with these problems! We have this belief that following God will be easy. The gospel message I heard was where God promised me a home in heaven, forgiveness of sin, and a blessed life where every desire of my heart would be met. Instead, I get a future where enemies live in the land, obstacles abound, walled up cities look impenetrable and the people there are giants! So the truth is - being a follower of Jesus is not an easy life. Who here has found this journey and easy one? Who here has not wanted to turn back from time to time because the giants of cynicism and compromise want to lure us off up some back alley? Who here doesn't get tired of the obstacles that stand in the way?

The Head and the Heart

The answer is between your ears (thinking), but it is your heart which steers your beliefs between your ears. I was thinking about this the other night before I think I fell off to sleep and I was wondering which comes first, the heart or the mind? Which do we need to align ourselves to God first? Our thinking or what we call our heart which is where our values and affections live? And I think I got some wisdom on this. I remember when sailing on the Tauranga harbour in my catamaran. Firstly, I decided where I wanted to go and then I set the sails and trimmed them with the rudder to steer me towards where I had set my direction. I believe the heart is the first – you decide the direction of your life and then you set your sail and steer towards it by your daily choice and thinking. *You adjust your thinking to align with your heart*. Both are needed. You cannot just decide, in your heart, that you want to follow Jesus pathway and then not make daily strategic choices that reflect that. And it was Kadesh Barnea that exposed the heart of the ten leaders who went to spy out the land and then the people who believed their report. Their hearts were found wanting.

Something died at Kadesh Barnea ….the score was, Giants 10, Believers 2.

Giants won the day and hope died. Only two people emerged unscathed from the ordeal – an old man, Caleb and a young man, Joshua. Just to the north of Kadesh Barnea, in the hill country lived these Nephilim where the enemies were the strongest. Years later, Joshua would come back to this very place to rout them and occupy. I think for Moses, Kadesh Barnea was a bitter disappointment. Moses learns that the consequences of the people’s unbelief would be to turn around and head south again into the dessert and that this would be his home for the next 37 years among a disgruntled and rebellious people who would die off one by one in the desert.

The people though pushed on and thought that after a superficial repentance, the land of promise would be theirs. Despite Moses warnings, they went and they were soundly defeated.

Exit Ramp 4 is a popular exit for many people. I wonder whether we are at Kadesh Barnea. Our church stands on the edge of a new chapter. Who will lead us into the future? What kind of future will it be? But the question that each of us must face is…… how much do we want what God has for us and will we pay the price to secure it? Remember, this is not so much all about the leaders deciding, this is for each of us to decide…..the team of 200.

You are at Kadesh Barnea and it’s time to choose. But know this – going into occupy the land is not peace – its war!

*God can make a way when there is no other way in the wilderness for you? When your enemy presses in do not fear – the battle belongs to the Lord! But only when your heart is right before God.*