

## **CHANGE OF PLAN**

*October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

### **Text**

Luke 9:57-62

Numbers 13:1, 25-31; 14:5-11

### **Introduction**

How many of you like happy endings when you read a book or watch a film? ...

I like love stories where couples live happily ever after & mysteries where the bad guy gets what's coming to him.

I like happy endings - & just endings. Anything else makes me very uncomfortable. Which makes parts of the Bible very difficult for me to cope with!

The account of how the Israelites did NOT go into the Promised Land is a top unfavourite!

### **The Journey So Far**

Over the past few Sundays, we have been journeying with Moses and his freedom marchers.

Scripture and archeology suggest that former Egyptian slaves & other oppressed people came together in the Sinai Peninsula & formed a community.

These disparate people shared a trust in Yahweh and a desire for a better life.

God had proved his faithfulness in multiple ways. He had liberated the enslaved; helped with a difficult water crossing; & miraculously provided food & water for them in the desert.

These people KNEW that God was good!

On Mount Sinai, Yahweh revealed the Divine self to the people and promised that, if they obeyed God's laws, he would lead them safely to a new homeland.

And so the people, nourished & guided by God, complete their sojourn in the desert and arrive at Canaan.

The Bible tells us that their total travelling time was a little over 1 year. (Numbers 10:11)

As they near the Canaanite border, Moses selected a representative from every tribe & sent them on a reconnaissance mission. He wanted to make sure that planning & decision-making was shared equally.

Unfortunately, as all of us know, democracy works better in theory than in practice!

Moses' spies returned with very mixed opinions.  
While some were bowled over by the fertile land & lush crops, others only saw the negatives.

The glass-half-full group came back laden with fruit – figs & pomegranates & clusters of grapes so big they had to be carried on a pole between 2 men.  
Just think, the people had been surviving on quail & honeydew for over a year; imagine how it felt to see all that fresh fruit.

I surprised they didn't all march in straight away!  
They didn't though.  
They didn't because of the report from the glass-half-empty spies.

These men didn't notice the abundant crops. Instead, they noted the fortified towns & the fact that the local inhabitants were tall!  
Oh my! Who knew that our religious ancestors practiced "heightism"!

Nobody was very tall in the ancient world but it seems that the Canaanites had a significant height advantage over the Israelites.  
This was probably because they had been an enslaved people for several generations.  
Slavery does not promote healthy growth.

Anyway, however tall these Canaanites actually were, it made the nervous nellys among the Jews feel very small & very vulnerable.  
So, on the one hand Canaan was a lush & fertile land.  
On the other hand, it was occupied by fit people who lived in fortified towns.

A land full of promise vs. a possible tough fight to settle there. What would you have chosen to do?

You see, there was 1 more factor in the equation: God had PROMISED that they could live in this land.  
As far as God was concerned, it was a done deal.

But not for the people!  
They decided to discuss & debate whether this should really be their new homeland.

Despite the wonderful descriptions of Canaan & the delicious fruit that was brought along to prove their point, the pro-immigration group lost to the fear-mongers.  
The people decided this land was not for them.

Moses & Aaron & Joshua begged them to reconsider -but to no avail.  
The Israelites were not prepared to do anything that might possibly be dangerous.

Returning to Egypt was more acceptable to them than running into conflict with the Canaanites.

Remember, Canaan was not a unified nation. It was a collection of fortified towns, city-states & tribal lands belonging to different ethnic groups. There was no border control and no immigration authority.

Fighting & skirmishes would have occurred but it should have been possible for the Israelites to find a quiet corner & settle there.

The people wanted no part of it!

They didn't want to take any risks & they didn't want to take any chances.

So they stayed put-

in the desert;

for 39 more years!

*"So, how did that work out for you?!"*

### ***Change of Plan***

God had led this motley community of slaves and refugees out of oppression. He had pledged to be their God & to watch over them at all times.

God had even chosen a new country for them; a place where they would be free to raise families, farm the land & prosper.

Yahweh led them to the very edge of this new home, new freedom & new opportunity to flourish; and the people said, *"no thanks."*

*"Sorry God, we don't like the place you chose for us.*

*There are tall people there!"*

God's plans were thrown out.

And the people's plan was put into operation.

They stayed in the desert.

They remained there until everyone from the generation that had escaped from Egypt died.

Only then, did God lead their children & grandchildren into the Promised Land.

None of the adults who made it out of Egypt made it into the new homeland.

Not even Moses.

### ***Deciding Not to Trust***

The Bible enables us to follow the Israelites' journey from slavery to freedom.  
We know how God protected & provided for them.  
And we're amazed that these people didn't trust God enough to gratefully accept the  
homeland he had provided for them.

How could anyone be so foolish?  
Or so lacking in faith?

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It's easy to mock decisions that were made over 3,000 years ago (c. 1250 BCE).  
But the reality is that we behave like those Israelites all the time.  
God leads us to a place of great blessing & we say, "*no thank you, there are tall people  
there!*"

Well, maybe we don't say that exactly. But most of us question God's choices.

We fuss over details that are not quite to our liking.  
We fret about what we might have to give up.  
We fear that we might not succeed.  
In the end, our fretting & fear gets the better of us & we decline God's offer.  
**We make a decision not to trust God.**

**Which is exactly what our faith ancestors did all those centuries ago.**

### ***Risk-Free Risk***

God is not a dictator who insists that we follow a plan laid down billions of years ago.  
God is a loving Parent & a wise Teacher who understands us better than we understand  
ourselves.

God KNOWS what would make us the most happy, the most healthy & the most  
successful.

God even gets how each of us are differently religious. That's why there are so many  
faith traditions & denominations & places of worship.

Our Heavenly Parent has provided every possible means for human beings to flourish.

**Following God's advice is guaranteed risk-free!**

Most of us, most of the time, think of it as just the opposite.  
Even if we acknowledge that God knows best, we suspect that his plans are too pious &  
self-sacrificing to be in any way enjoyable.

We worry that living life on God's terms will be too restrictive.  
We fear that we might somehow lose out.  
And so we do what we think is best.

Like wasting the best 39 years of our lives in a desert!

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Every day, God leads us to the edge of blessings.  
Blessings of wellness & of spiritual wellbeing.  
Blessings concerning our homes, our relationships & our careers.

More often than not, we prefer the desert of our own choosing to the delights God has in store.

But here's the really neat thing about God:  
what he wants for us is the very best of what we want for ourselves.  
If our wishes for the future are wishes for health & happiness & fulfillment, God wants them for us too.

Career goals, relationship dreams, retirement plans, even church hopes, are all endorsed by God.

The only difference between our plans & God's is that he actually KNOWS the best way for us to achieve our deepest desires.

So, if you've set your heart on a house where God knows you'll be unhappy you WILL experience Divinely-inspired misgivings.  
Other than that, God is delighted when we find a home we love.

God tackles jobs & relationships in much the same way.  
God doesn't demand that we follow a specific career path; marry a particular person or only have goody-two-shoes church friends.

But if God knows that person A or job B might hurt us or cause us harm, expect Divine opposition.

God is not a micro-manager.  
He cherishes human freedom.

When we wish for things that are good for us, God's response is a constant "Go for it!"

And, when we fail to strive for the best, God works to bring those blessings to us in spite of ourselves.  
Our Heavenly Parent persistently calls us to good health, loving relationships & meaningful roles in life.

The nagging voice telling you to exercise more – that's God!

Remember: it was God who made donuts a dreary beige & apples a bright & shiny red!

God is speaking when a trusted friend gives you relationship advice.  
And you realize you MUST get a new job before the current one kills you.

Whether it's a health alert or a lesson on love, God is constantly looking out for us.  
Even when life takes a nasty turn – even when it's all our fault - God is there with a plan.

Promises of blessing are always on offer.

### ***Conclusion***

God rescued a whole people from slavery.  
He linked them up with other dispossessed groups and invited them to create a home together under his direction.

And what a home God picked out!  
Fertile land, lush crops – all theirs for the asking.

But the people saw tall people.  
And they suspected trouble.  
So they said, “no thank you; it's nice but it's not for us.”

The people chose not to trust God.  
Instead the desert chose them.  
No one ever left there again.

Blessings from God or deserts of our own making – the choice is ours.  
Amen.