

- **\*Read Matthew 19:23-26\*** If I were to ask you what comes to mind when you think of failure in the Bible, what would you think of? What particular stories come to mind? You might think of this man here in **Matt. 19** who failed to give it all up for God. You might think of Adam and Eve and their failures in the Garden of Eden. You might think of King Saul's failures. Many more examples might come to mind, but I ask this...what is the commonality in all of these failures? I would suggest that the answer lies in the text that we just read here in **Matt. 19**. The failure of all of these individuals was based upon their unwillingness to let God do as He wanted. Instead of following God's will, they decided to deviate and follow their own desires, and at the end of the day, their desires lead them to failure. What Jesus said those many years ago still rings true today, "with people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
- There is one particular story that I think parallels very well for us as we begin our efforts into growing as a church in 2016. **Numbers 13 & 14** detail for us the account of the Israelites failing to enter into the land of promise. For them, this was a major point of transition. They had the opportunity to take the next step as God's people and take control of the land that He had promised to their father Abraham so many years before. Yet, they failed. In fact, they failed miserably.
- Like the children of Israel, we are still at the cusp of transition. With the New year brings new goals, hopes, and ambitions. But unlike Israel, our story has yet to be written. How will this year turn out for us as a local church, as families, and as individuals? We have the opportunity ahead of us to make 2016 a great year, but there is also the possibility of it being a failure. That's not being pessimistic, that's just being realistic. But the good news, is that we can look to the Bible, particularly the Old Testament as we talked about last Sunday night, and we can learn from the successes and failures of others. This morning I would like for us to do that. I would like for us to look at what caused this great failure within Israel, and I would like for us to consider 4 ways that we can make 2016 a failure as a church, as families, and as individuals. Their mistakes in Numbers 13 & 14 can teach us how avoid failure during what should be a great year for this group of Christians in 2016.
- ★ Ch. 13 begins with God giving Moses the instructions to go and spy out the land and to insure that it truly was as God had said it would be. **13:23** indicates to us that truly the land was abundantly fertile and good for living. However...if we skip to the end of this episode we see something that we might not have expected...by the time we get to **14:26-35** we see God denouncing the people and punishing them. How did they get to this point? How had they turned this promising future into such a waste of God's blessing? Let's consider 4 mistakes they made that cost them the promised land, and then let's consider how these 4 mistakes can cost us a successful 2016.

### I. Don't trust in God's power. (13:25ff)

- A. The stage was perfectly set for the Israelites to march in and conquer the land, but instead they cowered in fear and failed to trust in God's great power.
  1. God's power should have been beyond obvious to them because of the many things He had already done up to this point.
    - a) The 10 plagues against Egypt were obvious showings of God's great power. (**Ex. 7-12**)
    - b) The parting of the Red Sea was a sign of God's power and it coming back into place on the Egyptians should have showed the people of God's protection over them. (**Ex. 14**)
    - c) The bread and quail from God provided for the physical needs of the people. (**Ex. 16**)
  2. But for some reason, these men (who were considered to be leaders 13:2) seemed to completely forget about all of it when they went into the land to scope it out.
  3. They seemed to forget about how big and powerful their God was, and instead they focused on how big and scary looking the people of the land were. (**13:31**)
  4. They failed because they were scared and wouldn't put their faith and trust in the power of God.
- B. We can easily fall into the hole of not truly trusting in God's power to help us accomplish our goals for this year.
  1. In much the same way, God has done so much for us. He has forgiven us of our sins. He has walked with us, daily. He has provided this church as a group to help us grow and fight against the evils of this world.
  2. Yet, could it be that I am still fearful of growing and taking that next step in my faith?
  3. Maybe I haven't been that great at being committed to daily Bible reading and study in the past. Instead of putting my trust in God that I can be successful at it this year, I, from the start, think that I can't be successful in reading and studying my Bible this year. If that is my attitude then I don't trust God as I should and I will fail in 2016.

4. Or it might be that in the past I haven't done a great job of being the servant that I ought to be towards God, others, and the church. This year is exactly the type of year that I need in order to grow in areas that I can serve. However, what if I just don't think that I can serve? What if I don't think that I can grow? Again, I'm not trust in the God who Jesus said all things are possible through.
5. If I don't put my trust and faith in God's power like the Israelites didn't, then I'm going to experience the same failures that they experienced.

## II. Have a bad attitude. (13:1,2)

- A. The bad attitudes of the people were a huge hindrance towards what should have been a successful transition into the promised land.
  1. Not only did they not trust in God, but they allowed that insecurity to produce within them attitudes that were poor and infectious.
  2. The people began to cry and grumble against the Lord and His servants. They bickered and complained about their present situation, and they said some very foolish things. **(14:2)**
  3. Sadly, this wasn't the first time that these people had complained. Remember that the bread and quail from heaven was a result of their poor attitudes. When things were not exactly how they wanted them or exactly how they liked them then the people complained. **(Ex. 16:2,3)**
  4. These types of attitudes majorly contributed to the failures of this people.
- B. Bad attitudes can be just as detrimental to the endeavors of a local church and Christians.
  1. I have heard absolute horror stories about congregations who were trying to do good work, but one or two of the members had bad attitudes and it almost completely destroyed the congregations.
  2. Bad attitudes are like bad apples and they can have a great negative influence on those around us.
  3. Bad attitudes can be a result of a number of different things. I might have a bad attitude because of some perceived wrong against me. I might have a bad attitude because I didn't get my way with a particular something. Or something wasn't done the way I thought it should be done and so I'm going to have a bad attitude and let it affect everyone around me. If I don't get my way then everyone is going to suffer because of it.
  4. Regardless of the reason, having a sorry attitude will do nothing but hurt our chances of being successful in 2016. Being successful in 2016 as a church will take a lot of effort and hard work. We don't have time for anyone to add to our workload because of a bad attitude.
  5. Sure, sometimes things don't go our way, but we need to be better than these Israelites and press on instead of allowing our bad attitudes to lead us into great failures.

## III. Continuously question the decisions of leadership. (14:3,4)

- A. Their lack of trust in God's power and their poor attitudes snowballed into these people constantly questioning every move that God through Moses and Aaron made.
  1. Like their poor attitudes, this wasn't the first time that the people had questioned God about what He was doing for them. Back in **Num. 11**, the people questioned God concerning who would give them meat to eat. **(v.4)**
  2. The complained to God about the great food they had back in Egypt. The missed the fish and the cucumbers and melons and leeks and onions and the garlic. **(v.5)** They complained and their appetite left them. All they seemed to do was complain against God and Moses and question what they were doing. **(v.10)**
  3. Not much seems to have changed between **chapter 11 and chapter 14**. They, again, questioned God and His decision to bring them into this promised land. They believed that they were all just going to die. They would've returned to Egypt if it was up to them. **(14:3)**
  4. They event went so far as to say that they should appoint a new leader for themselves, but even if they did I suspect they would've just complained against him as well. **(14:4)**
  5. Their constant complaining and questioning of God led them to not be admitted into this promised land. God wouldn't reward a people who didn't put their trust in His ability to do what is best for them.
- B. Failure to trust in leadership can absolutely destroy the efforts of a local church.
  1. Our shepherds have poured a lot of time, energy, and effort into setting goals for this local church in 2016. They have made these great sacrifices because they want to see this church grow and be as strong as successful as it can be.

2. Their efforts can easily be nullified by a membership who question their every move. There are few things that I can think of that are more frustrating than being in a position of leadership and having those you are trying to lead question your every move and decision. Doing this can cause leadership to second guess themselves, it can cause others to lose confidence in the leadership, and the leadership might stop putting forth the effort to lead a church in a positive direction.
3. As members of a local church (Pleasant Plains specifically), we were responsible for appointing our four shepherds to their positions of leadership. If we did not think that they were able to do so, if we didn't think they would do what is best for this church, then they should not have been appointed to such a position.
4. However, they are good men who are able to do this work, and I believe everyone here would agree with me. They are men who have proven through the way they have lived their lives that they are able to lead this local group, and because of this we ought to follow the wise words of **Hebrews 13:17** and allow them to lead us with joy and not grief.
5. If we allow them to lead us without questioning their every decision then we will be successful in 2016, but if we don't allow them to serve and lead with joy then failure is surely to follow as it did for the Israelites.

#### **IV. Silence those who are optimistic for the future. (14:5-10)**

- A. Our first 3 points finally culminated with these people trying to permanently silence Moses, Aaron and those who believed they could take the land.
  1. Moses, Aaron, Joshua, & Caleb are distraught over the response from the children of Israel. They fall before the assembly and they all tear their clothes to show how heartbroken they are over the faithlessness of the people. **(14:5,6)**
  2. They do everything they can to convince the people that this land was perfect and attainable. They try to convince the people to trust in God and follow His plan for them because He is with them, but they just won't have any of it. **(14:7-9)**
  3. Instead of hearing and taking the words of these righteous men to heart, they try to silence them for good by stoning them. Thankfully, the Lord intervenes for the leaders of Israel, but He is furious with the people and He begins His speech on the judgement that these faithless people would have to face. **(14:10)**
  4. But it was their ruthlessness and stand against those that were trying to have hope for the future that finally ended their run of poor decision making and behavior. It was the last of their actions that resulted in this people's failure to enter into the promised land.
- B. If we have a bad attitude, don't trust in God, and don't think that our leadership are leading us well then it isn't hard to imagine that we would try to silence those who look to be successful in our endeavors for this year.
  1. Those who do not support the efforts of this church will quickly grow tired of the encouraging words that are being spoken by those who see the potential good that will be done through those efforts.
  2. They like the Israelites will do what they can to silence those who are optimistic for this year within this church.
  3. This might be done through subtle comments about how much effort it takes. They might just simply say that these efforts won't do any good. They might even openly say that they refuse to support these efforts and the Israelites did.
  4. This type of rebellion will quickly snuff out any fire of excitement or encouragement that might be present within a local body of Christians. Much like the bad attitude, these actions will spread like wildfire and cause any good that is being done to be halted. Much like the Israelites, that next step in their walk with God will be stopped in its tracks.

Such a sad, sad story in **Numbers 13 & 14**. These people had it all. They were the chosen people of God. God was with them the whole way, and yet they didn't receive the reward because they made some crucial mistakes. We as a local church are entering into a new year with new goals and focuses. May God be with us as we strive to make this year successful. May God bless us and keep us as we trust in Him for the strength and guidance to make this year a success. As we focus on our many goals may we do those things necessary to be successful, and may we avoid these pitfalls that caused Israel to fail in this instance. May our God be glorified and honored and we work in 2016 to be better servants of the Kingdom and more like Jesus.