

NUMBERS 13:1-3, 26-33 “LIKE GRASSHOPPERS”

During the 1970s on channel 9 in Cincinnati, before the days of Oprah, Judge Judy, and the 5 o'clock newscast, they showed a movie at 4-o'clock every weekday afternoon.

I did not often watch this movie, but I remember one of them very well. It was called “The Beginning of the End.” It was the story of these insects which had morphed into huge, 100-foot monster insects.

I especially recall a scene where they are pouring out of Lake Michigan and obliterating downtown Chicago, while the military tries to destroy them.

Now the question is not, “Why do I remember that?” I do not know!

The question is, “Isn't that what people sometimes seem like to you?”

Several years ago, an author named Ed Welch wrote a book called, “When People Are Big, and God Is Small.” It was about peer pressure, codependency, and our fear of people.

Is that not an issue of our hearts and lives? Do we not experience those moments and those seasons when people seem so big, and God seems so small?

Maybe you experience this, when you seek the respect and even the affection of someone you admire, and you cannot seem to get it.

Maybe you experience this in school or at work, when you fear giving your opinion, because you know someone could hold it against you and even harm you.

Maybe a woman experiences this in the darkness of her home, as she dreads the prospect of more physical abuse.

Maybe you experience this with a friend, when you fear what will happen, if you don't go along with the plan.

Maybe we experience this as a church, in a world where so many seem so indifferent or even hostile to the good news of Jesus Christ.

People seem big, and God seems small.

In the book of Numbers, God's people are in the wilderness. It is not going well. We read of lots of grumbling, complaining, and rebellion.

The people are across the Jordan River from the land God has promised them. Moses sends a leader from each of the twelve tribes to “spy” in the new land. They are to see what the land and people are like.

These spies are courageous men. They are leaders in their tribes, and this is a dangerous journey.

Yet even the courage of the courageous withers, when people seem big, and God seems small.

This story speaks to our stories, and this story shows us more of the God who is the hero of this story, and the whole story of the Old Testament.

So let's ask, first, WHY DO OTHERS SEEM BIG?

Here is the first answer: *THEY ARE BIG.*

In a broken world, people are big, because people can harm us, and it is hard not to fear them!

Your boss is big! Your abusive spouse is big! Your angry and manipulative friend is big! Your mortgage company is big!

People seem big, because they are big!

When the spies enter the land, they go through land inhabited by people described as “the descendants of Anak.” The Anakites were known for their height. They were probably formidable fighters.

It would be like the prospect of playing basketball against Shaquille O'Neal. Yes, he is big!

As well, where do these Anakites live? The town is called Hebron. When the Israelites had lived there generations before, Hebron was “in the middle of nowhere”, as we would say. It was just a place for shepherds to stop.

But now, Hebron was apparently a much bigger city. It was a bigger city, with big people.

It was like wandering into New York City last summer. The sheer size of even Manhattan was overwhelming to us. We're going to conquer this?

Put yourself in the “sandals” of these spies. They are the descendants of a nation that has been in slavery in Egypt for generations. They are now living in a desert. Now they must defeat these big people, in these big cities.

No wonder they say in verse 28, “...the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.”

They are big! These are real people, and these are real enemies!

Some might tell you that the way to deal with big people, is to deny or downplay their bigness.

“Oh, he seems important, but he's not really that important.”

“Well, I it's tough when he beats you, but you can take it, can't you?”

“Sticks and stones can break your bones, but names can never hurt you.”

No! We do not deal with the bigness of people, by denying or downplaying the bigness of people. They are big, and they can hurt us.

With a word, that superior can take away your livelihood.

In a moment, that bully can make you bleed.

With one lie, that popular person can ruin your reputation.

Why do others seem big? They are big.

But why else do others seem big? They are big, and *THEY GET BIGGER*.

While it is true that in a broken world, people are big, it is also true that in a broken world, we can imagine people to be bigger than they are.

The spies enter the land. They describe the size of the people and the cities. Caleb says, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do this.”

Then we read, “But the other men who had gone up with him said, ‘We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.’ Then what?”

“And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, ‘The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim).

“We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

What are they saying?

* “The land devours...” The environment in this land is so awful, that people die from it. If that’s true, how can people live there now?

* “We saw the Nephilim.” The Nephilim are the race of giants we read about in Genesis 6. Are they really that big?

* “We seemed like grasshoppers...” Is it that bad? A human is hundreds of times the size of a grasshopper. Even if the Anakites are the size of the Nephilim, they are not that big.

These spies are either lying, or they are so overcome by their fear, that they cannot see the truth anymore. Their perception creates a reality in the people of Israel - a reality of terror. So, as you can read in chapter 14, the Israelites weep, grumble, and plot a return to Egypt.

They are big. But they get bigger, as our words and our minds blow them up to the size of giants. They are like the monster insects, pouring out of the lake and storming through Chicago!

We become paralyzed by fear. We become enslaved by that fear. They are big. They are bigger. To us, even bigger than God.

Can you relate to this? Let me tell you how I can.

Among the countless sins that God is revealing to me about myself, I am guilty of the sin of seeing people as bigger than they are.

For me, this works itself out in two ways: a terrible fear of conflict, and a horrible feeling when criticized.

I fear conflict. I do not want you to be angry at me, or upset with me. I hate the thought of you lashing out at me with strong words, or looking at me with frustrated eyes. It kills me. It ends my day. I am done.

I feel criticism. When I am criticized, I take it to heart - too much. I dwell on it. I brood on it. I obsess about it. Then I dwell, brood and obsess some more!

So what do I do? I avoid conflict. I avoid criticism. You are big. You are getting bigger. I am paralyzed. I am enslaved. All because you are as some one-hundred foot monster to me, coming out of the lake.

That is me. Maybe that is you. Or maybe others are big and getting bigger, for different reasons.

Maybe others are big and getting bigger, because you are so hungry for approval, that you will do anything for that approval.

Maybe others are big and getting bigger, because your imagination races to the worst thing that other person could do to you.

Maybe others are big and getting bigger, because you have been hurt, and you cannot forget it.

You are paralyzed. You are enslaved. Others are big, and they are getting bigger.

So - WHO MAKES OTHERS SEEM SMALL?

If people are big and God is small, and you know it is supposed to be the other way around, who will make it happen?

Obviously, the One who is big will make it happen! When people are big and God is small, we need God to show us his bigness.

We had a taste of this in Genesis, where we saw Abraham walking up the mountain, as he prepared to obey God and slay his own Son. Abraham did not know much, but he knew God, and that enabled him to follow God in faith.

So what is it about the Lord, that he has revealed to us, which shows our minds and our hearts, how much

bigger he is?

As we dig into these words in search of a big God, we find one. We find the big God who has, who is, and who will.

He is *THE GOD WHO HAS*.

What has God done? What he has done, even before the eyes of this generation, standing in the wilderness, looking at this land?

He has redeemed. They were in slavery in Egypt, with no hope of ever being freed. But with his mighty hand and outstretched arm, God has given them freedom. He has delivered his people from Egypt through the plagues, and he has secured their escape from Egypt's army by parting the Red Sea.

He has provided. There are something like 2-million people in this desert, wandering around. Where will the food and water come from? Despite all of their grumbling, the Lord has provided for them, again and again.

Yet the God who has, has not just redeemed and provided for the people of Israel. To use the words of the writer to the Hebrews, all of this is "an illustration for the present time." This redemption and provision displays the work of Jesus Christ, who has redeemed and provided for his people.

Redemption: freedom from the guilt and power of sin, through his death on the cross. In Jesus, this is ours.

Provision: all the blessings we have received, by the mercy of the One who has not treated us as our sins deserve. In Jesus, this is ours.

Full redemption. Complete provision.

"If God is for us," wonders Paul in Romans 8, "who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?..."

Believer in Jesus Christ, God is for you. How do you know? You have seen his redemption and his provision. He is the God who has done such great things for you. As you keep these truths firmly in your heart, God gets bigger, while those people get smaller.

A few weeks ago, Dale talked about visiting Gettysburg over Christmas. We did that about ten years ago, before they took down the big tower that overlooked the battlefield. We went to the top of that tower, and we could see, maybe better than people can see now, the immensity of that field. It was amazing to think of men filling those fields and hills, and falling there.

When we ponder the God who has, we go to the top of the tower, and we are amazed by the size of his grace to us.

That "big and getting bigger person" hates me because I am awkward, and clumsy, and because sometimes I say stupid things. But in Jesus, I know that God has redeemed me, and I know he loves me. And he is so much bigger.

That "big and bigger person" holds my job prospects in his or her hands. I am not sure it will go my way. But God has provided, and I am sure he will now provide again, even if it is not through this job. And he is so much bigger.

He is the God who has. He is *THE GOD WHO IS*.

What is God doing, in this generation?

He is being patient. The book of Numbers is tough to read, because just about every chapter seems to be a description of grumbling or rebellion. This will reach the point that in the next chapter, we see Moses asking God not to destroy the Israelites and start over with just Moses.

Time after time after time, God is faithful. Time after time after time, including here, they are faithless. But God is patient.

He is being kind. If you go to the start of the book of Deuteronomy, you will read Moses' words as he recalls this event. His original plan was to simply have the people enter the land and take it. But the people wanted to send in the spies first. So the Lord commands the sending of the spies.

This is kindness. They are not sure they can defeat these people. So in his kindness, the Lord allows them to "check things out" in the land.

He is the God of patience and kindness.

"And we know," Paul says in Romans 8, "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

It was true for God's people of that day, and it is true for God's people of this day. Believer in Jesus Christ, in all things, even with the people who seem so big to us, the Lord is working for your good. He has redeemed and provided. He is patient and kind.

Do you see this? Or do you just see big people, getting bigger?

Andree Seu of World magazine writes,

"I bagged rice on a co-op line elbow-to-elbow with a peaceful woman who was the mother of five children

and several foster children...

“I asked how she did it, and (she) said, ‘I do the next thing that needs to be done.’

“...I know what lay unspoken in her answer: God is sovereign, and God is good.

“First, if God were not in perfect control, Laurie would have to control all things, every atom in the universe, to assure a desirable outcome. But she knows she cannot in fact control all things, not even the next two minutes, and so she concedes control to him.

“Second, she believes that the God who controls all things controls them for her good.

“On these twin pillars does her soul find rest.”

He is sovereign and he is good. He is patient and kind, to the people he has redeemed, and for whom he provides.

How we need this peace, as people. That “big and getting bigger” person is never, never, never bigger than your patient and kind Lord. That person might bring you fear or bring you hurt, but you know your sovereign and good Lord will use it for your good, and you know he will be patient with you, and kind towards you, even as big people get bigger.

How we need this peace, as a church. We grumble. We complain. We fail. We fear.

Maybe we fear a culture that is full of “big and getting bigger” people, who seem to hate God’s kingdom.

Maybe we fear a government that is “big and getting bigger”, and may someday be hostile to truths we hold dear.

God is still bigger. God is still patient. God is still kind. Do not let those “monsters” obscure your view. He is sovereign. He is good.

He is the God who has. He is the God who is. He is *THE GOD WHO WILL*.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Send some men to explore the land of Canaan which I am giving to the Israelites.’”

That is God’s promise. In his patience and kindness, God is reminding his people of his promise.

Just think of that city Hebron. It is near where God first promised the land to Abraham, and it is where Abraham and Sarah were buried. Think of these men journeying near there, and knowing this, and recalling the promise.

Indeed, the promise was kept. Forty years later, after this generation that did not trust God’s promise had passed from the scene, God used one of the two faithful spies, Caleb, to win the battle that secured the land.

Paul asks in Romans 8, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...”

“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

That is God’s promise.

But what about the monsters? What about the people who make us feel like grasshoppers?

Could it be that God brings them to us, so that we will see his “bigness” in a new way? Think about it. What if the land was barren? What if the cities were weak? What if the people were little?

We would not see the bigness of God. We would think we could defeat those people, on our own.

Maybe God brings the giants, so that we will see that we are indeed like grasshoppers, and so that we will see that all we have, all we are, and all we ever hope to be, is from this One who is truly big, and before whom even the biggest of people, are like grasshoppers.

He is the God who will. He will be faithful to his people, and he will show his faithfulness even before the biggest of people, so that his people will see how big he is.

Over a hundred years ago, a woman lived and suffered. Several brothers died in the Civil War. Her husband lost his sight. Two children died of illness.

She responded by writing poems. Here is one.

Grieving and worn, discouraged, Sick of the day-long strife
Bruised by the restless tossing, Over the sea of life
Hurt by the hands I trusted, Yearning for rest and home
Famishing, faint and doubting, Unto the Book I come.

We have come to the Book of God again this morning, and we have met with the God who has, who is, and who will.

Who is big and getting bigger in your life today? Before whom, do you feel like a grasshopper?

Is it an unfaithful or distant spouse? Is it a cruel co-worker? Is it a person who just makes you nervous, for reasons you cannot explain?

Indeed, you may seem like a grasshopper before those people. But they are like a grasshopper before the God who has redeemed and provides, who blesses with patience and kindness, and who will always keep his

promises.

People are big. Sometimes they seem bigger than they are. But God is biggest, and in Jesus Christ, we are his own.