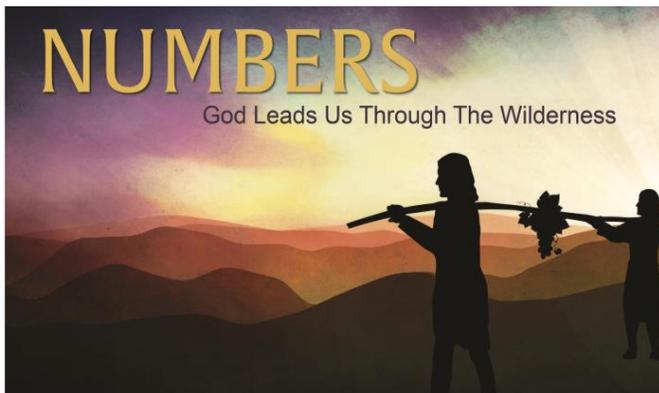


God Calls Us to Claim His Promise

Fall Sermon Series on Numbers
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
October 9, 2016

TEXT: Numbers 13:1-3, 21-33; 14:1-10

We continue this morning in our fall series on the Book of Numbers in an incident, a portion of God's Word, that is one of the most remembered moments in the entire Bible, and my



emotions are running high. This is a very intense a portion of Scripture. If you are just joining us, we are going through the Book of Numbers, and the theme of Numbers is that God leads His people through the wilderness. The Book of Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible, and it narrates the great event of God's people moving from the base of Mount

Sinai to the very borders of the Promised Land. This morning we will look at this moment in Scripture when God calls us forward to claim His promise. God's people have been brought out

of Egypt. They are in this gray triangle of land called the Peninsula Sinai. They come out of Egypt down one side of this peninsula to Mount Sinai at the base of this triangle, and then they are moving up the other side, moving towards the land of promise. They have been at Sinai for almost a year, and then last week they set out from the Mount Sinai to move towards the land that God has promised. They reach the very borders of the land in the text before us. Last week we looked at when the journey began. It



was just three days into the journey that God's people panicked over lack of water, over lack of food, and they complained against the Lord, and this provokes judgment. The first two stops of this journey were a place of burning, a place where they buried some of the community in graves of desiring when they rushed to meet their own needs, pleaded with God to provide meat for them to eat, and then each one gathered at a minimum 18 garbage cans filled with quail.

This morning we look at the moment when God's people are brought right to the very edge of the land. They are in Kadesh Barnea, just south of the border. The text begins in Numbers 13 with the commission that God would send people to spy out the land. The word used here is the same word that is used of the pillar of cloud and fire, that God goes out in front of His people to survey the land, to reconnoiter the area, to prepare in advance for this conquest of the land that has been promised. These men are sent, they are chosen. Again, it is a group of 12. This is a different group of 12 than the 12 ancestral heads of the tribes, and Moses sends them to spy out the land of Canaan and gives them this set of questions in Numbers 13:17-20 to see how the land is:

"Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land."

The final summons is for them to be of good courage and bring back some fruit of the land, some palpable evidence of that which God has promised. As they prepare to go up into the land, this group of 12 includes a list of inspiring names. They have names like: God has heard, remembered; God is the Redeemer, faithful; the One who gives me safety. It's an inspiring group at the very beginning, and Numbers 13:21 tells us:

"So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath."

This group of 12 begin to carry out this mission. They go up from Kadesh Barnea, the area of the Wilderness of Sin, move north and travel over the full length of the land. They travel a distance

of about 250 miles there and back. The view of the land that they have as they enter is striking. They didn't have the satellite view—they were little bit more on ground-level! But what you can see in this satellite image that was so striking about this land is that it is the only green area in this whole region. God's people at this moment are in the southern edge of this. This is looking North, and the people



are encamped in the wilderness which is barren. You must go from oasis to oasis in the wilderness, and they are preparing to scope out this Promised Land, and this land is lush and green. It's astonishing. When the land is described in other portions of the Bible, it is unlike Egypt where you are dependent for life on the regular inundation of the Nile River. This land is

different. It's well-watered. There are streams and rivers. It's lush. You could see this from outer space. When you look down at this section, this is a good land, and it is a land uniquely equipped to provide for God's people. As they move into the land, the narrative tells us they move up from the south. I want you to notice that they view the whole land. They go up from the very from the southern edge to the northern edge. They notice in their journeys that there are people in the land. They notice, as they move back south towards Israel's encampment, that

it is harvest time, July or August. They come to the Valley of Eshcol, which means the *Valley of the Cluster*, and they cut down a branch with a cluster of grapes. They also bring pomegranates and figs. I still remember the first pomegranate I ever saw. My mom gave it to me, and I remember thinking: "This is not an apple. I wonder what's inside there." I remember cracking open this pomegranate and seeing hundreds of seeds and then eating them and thinking: "This is awesome," and then looking down my shirt and thinking: "I hope this comes out!" which it didn't. The pomegranate is a fruit that signifies the potency of the land. Fresh figs are delicious—a far cry from the Fig Newton. Many of us know figs only from this very weak form of food, which is a dried fig



with lots of extra sugar. Fig Newtons cannot be compared with the fresh fig. They bring back evidence of this. Most translations say they carry it on a pole. The word that is used for a pole, the frame or wooden apparatus that they loaded with fruit, is actually the same word that is used in Numbers 4 to carry the sacred vessels of the tabernacle. They bring back very real evidence that the land is good.

They return to Kadesh, to the camp, after 40 days, and they bring the report beginning in Numbers 13:27:

"We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit."

This is the biblical idiom for a lush area. To flow with milk and honey signifies that there is a superabundant pastureland. There is plenty of room and area for animals to graze and milk to be produced. The honey of antiquity is not the honey from bees, but it is the honey from the date palm that grows in rich quantities. To have a land that is flowing with milk and honey is the

biblical idiom for the superabundance of this place, and they say that this is its fruit. They were sent to spy out the land, and they come back with a report that what God has promised to us is staggeringly beautiful and wonderful, and this is real evidence of it. Remember, the people have been in this wilderness, and can you imagine that as good as a pomegranate looks when you see it in the organic section of the grocery store, the pomegranate looks 10 times better when you been coming out of the wilderness. Fresh figs, fresh pomegranates, grapes at the time of harvest: this is its fruit, they say, and yet Numbers 13:28, has a massive *however*:

“However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.”

This *however* is the portal of doubt in the human heart. All that God has promised is good. It's wonderful. We have evidence of it. We see in our hands. We taste, and yet we say, *however*. *However*, the people who are dwelling in the land are strong. *However*, the cities are not open, in fact, they are fortified cities. Jericho is one of the earliest cities on the planet, and the walls of Jericho were 30 feet thick, and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. We'll hear more about them in just a minute. In Numbers 13:29 they say there are people in fact all over the place:

“The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.”

The land is filled with people. It's like going and making preparations for the night that you are going to ask this beautiful woman that you been courting to marry you. You make the reservations at your favorite restaurant, and you come in and you find her there, and there are 10 other guys sitting there. You say: “She's beautiful, but there are 10 other guys here and they have bigger diamond rings than I have!” The people tremble at the scale of the challenge before them. Caleb responds. Caleb in Hebrew means *dog*. Caleb is a name that indicates *steadfastness* and *loyalty* in antiquity. Caleb responds to this overwhelming doubt, and he quiets the people. He summons them with faith and says in Numbers 13:30:

“Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.”

The other 10 who have gone and seen the land, say in Numbers 13:31:

“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.”

Have you ever been around someone who looks at a situation that is difficult and hard and you're trying to summon faith and confidence in God, and the person next to you says: “There's no way you can do it”? “There is no way you can beat this cancer.” “There's no way you can succeed on this test.” “There is no way you will be able to get into this program.” “There is no way that God is powerful enough to produce in your life what He has said He could do and that He would do.” Your heart melts. The 10 spies say there's no way we can do it. The people who are there are stronger. They say the land, though we have evidence of the fruit of it, is a land

that devours its inhabitants, which is an image of constant warfare and strife and battle. They say this is not a good place; people who go there die. They say the people living there are towering; they are people of great height. They make this specific in Numbers 13:33:

“And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”

For those of us who know the Bible well, you remember that the Nephilim are mentioned only one other time in Scripture, in Genesis 6, in the cryptic passage where the sons of God, who are probably ancient kings, take for themselves wives, and they have descendants. Their descendants are called Nephilim, which means *fallen ones* in Hebrew. These *fallen ones* are mighty warriors. They are powerful. They seem to be people of great stature. We have found anthropoid coffins in Israel of people who are above average in height—just above average in height. It is not that they are 12 or 25 feet high. But, they are huge, and they say we seem like grasshoppers to them. Have you ever felt small, I mean, very small? When you take a sober assessment of the challenges in front of you and you evaluate those on your own strength, you often conclude the challenges are too great. The obstacles are too many; the people are too strong; and we are like grasshoppers. This is a decisive moment of faith in the life of God's people. This moment becomes a moment, a binary decision. This moment of the 10 who report that the obstacles are too great and the two, Joshua and Caleb, who say we can go forward proves a decisive moment.

How does the congregation respond in Numbers 14? We see that the people respond by crying all night; they grumble and complain against Moses and Aaron, and then their lament is verbalized in Numbers 14:2-3 with devastating effect:

“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 a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?”

Their fears come out into the open with the question of why is God bringing us into this land. Is it just so that we can be killed? Our wives and children will become spoils of war, and they conclude, as fear overtakes faith, that it be better for us to go back to Egypt. They resolve in Numbers 14:4:

“Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

We need a new pastor, and we are going to go back! This is a devastating moment. They've come out from Egypt, the most powerful country in the world at this time, without firing a shot. God has split the waters of the Sea and caused them to walk on dry land and drowned their enemies. He has brought us to the place where we saw His visible glory, and He spoke to us audibly, called us to who we are to be, provided for us in the wilderness, and we are standing

right on the edge of the land. They could see it. It's like right across the street, and from that point they resolve: "Let's go all the way back!" The promises of God ring loudly in the background. This is a robust rejection of God as our Redeemer. It is a painful pulling down of God's promise. It is a devastating disregard of divine decree that goes all the way back to Genesis. In Genesis 12:1, when the Lord first appeared to Abram, He said:

"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'"

The land, this this promise of entering, this is introduced in Genesis 12. Abraham saw that there were people dwelling in the land, and yet by faith Abraham set up altars and worshiped the Lord at the four corners of the land. God had told Abraham in Genesis 13:17:

"Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

The Lord said to Abram in Genesis 15:13-18:

"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. . . . And they shall come back here in the fourth generation. . . . To your offspring I give this land."

The Lord has been faithful to His promises. He has brought us out from the land as He said He would do. He says in Exodus 13 that you will not go back that way again. He says in Deuteronomy 17:16:

"The LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again'"

You will never return to that place of slavery again. Note the power of our selective memory to reach again and say: "Wouldn't it be better to go back to our old life?" We have tremendous power to romanticize the life that we had before we knew Christ and to imagine that as a time of joy and ease. When the burden of discipleship weighs heavy on us; when our fear overtakes our faith and we are unwilling, we dig in our heels and we say: "Lord, I'm not willing to go where You are calling me. I want my old life back." It is a devastating moment.

How do Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb respond? We read in Numbers 14:5-6:

"Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes."

They intercede before the Lord. They plead with the people in Numbers 14:7-8:

"The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey."

They plead with the people to come forward, and they know in the context of standing in the gap between the Lord that His anger is aroused against the people. They plead with the people and say in Numbers 14:9:

“Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”

You need people like this in your life because you will get to these moments, and one of the most powerful object lessons of all of Scripture is this moment. When the people see the promise, they can see that it is green across the street, they see the pomegranates and the figs and the grapes, and yet they hear this report that it is going to be difficult. It is not easy; it is like Jesus' call to the disciples to say: “If you want to follow Me, pick up your cross and follow Me.” Some of us who have maybe picked up a counterfeit vision of discipleship in the Christian bookstore that says you trust in Jesus and everything is easy, return that. Keep your receipt on that book. That's a counterfeit vision of discipleship. Real discipleship is God, in His sovereignty, knows just how much you can handle. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. He knows just how much you can handle, so keep your eyes riveted on Him. He knows that if life is easy, you will look to the left and to the right. He knows that you'll romanticize the past. He knows that if He makes everything easy and eliminates all barriers, your faith will never grow. You will stay like an infant, and you will not know the greatness and the power of the living God that you and I are invited to see and experience and live out of from this narrative. Do not underestimate what's at stake. These words are strong words, to rebel against the Lord. The men say: “The Lord is with us.” The Lord's response is a judgment. Though they plead with the people, the people respond with its decision for a religious execution. They are pleading with the life of a generation. They respond in Numbers 14:10:

“Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones.”

“We're going to stone them, and we're going back.” It is really the saddest moment in the Pentateuch, and the Lord makes it really clear what's going on. In Numbers 14:11, the Lord says to Moses:

“How long will this people despise Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?”

That word *despise* is a strong word, isn't it? You see, if you don't go where God is leading, the Lord says you are distaining, despising Him. The Lord says they did not believe in Him in spite of all that He had done. Moses falls on his face and intercedes, just like at the golden calf. He reminds God of the revelation of His mercy at the golden calf, and he pleads in Numbers 14:18-19:

“The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and

transgression. . . Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of Your steadfast love, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.”

The Lord responds to Moses in Numbers 14:20:

“I have pardoned, according to your word.”

Yet, the consequence of sin is played out. The Lord says in Numbers 14:22-24:

“None of the men who have seen My glory and My signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed My voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised Me shall see it. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.”

In a moment that makes me want to weep, in Numbers 14:25, the Lord says to Moses:

“Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valleys, turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.”

Turn around and go back. They were right at the edge and the Lord says: “Turn around and go back.” The Lord hears the doubt, the grumbling, the disbelief, the fear that they would die. The Lord says: “Measure for measure you will die in the wilderness. Measure for measure you were afraid that your wives and children will be plundered, but it's your children who will inherit the land.” We read in Numbers 14:39:

“When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly.”

They mourn greatly when they hear this word of judgment from the Lord. They seem to repent. In Numbers 14:40 they say:

“Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned.”

We're sorry. But, it's too late. Moses says in Numbers 14:42:

“Do not go up, for the Lord is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies.”

But they say: “Oh, we're going to try it anyway,” and the people make an initial assault on the southern border of the land, and they are cut down. The ark does not go with them, and Moses himself does not leave the camp. The Amalekites and Canaanites in the hill country rushed down and decimate them, and they end up calling that place *Hormah*, which means *destruction*.

It's a sober moment, and it is this judgment, just as the people look at the land for 40 days, the Lord says: “You are going to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.” The narrative of Numbers doesn't tell us all that happens in those 40 years. We will see, as we continue in our series toward the end, that this new generation arises, filled with faith, lessons learned, but this

moment is one that God's people remember forever. Numbers 14 is quoted more times than almost any other passage.

I want to apply this to us today in the ways that the Bible itself applies it. At the end of Numbers 32, this scene is remembered: the potent effect of discouragement, the devastating impact of discouraging other people from following the Lord. In Numbers 32:7-8, Moses asked:

“Why will you discourage the heart of the people of Israel from going over into the land that the LORD has given them? Your fathers did this, when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to see the land.”

Discouragement is devastating, and it is something that we can often fall into the habit of doing. The barriers are real. These are not imaginary Nephilim. They are there, and yet the Lord holds us accountable for breathing discouragement. In Deuteronomy 1, this incident is described again. Deuteronomy 1:27-28 says:

“You murmured in your tents and said, ‘Because the LORD hated us He has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, ‘The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven.’”

Discouraging other people from following the Lord causes them to bring into question the very character of God. Discouragement spills out and overflows. Psalm 95 remembers this moment. Psalm 95 begins in a way that we often sing, and it has inspired many hymns and songs:

*“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
In His hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are His also.
The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land.
Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. “*

Most of us stop right there, but that is just the beginning of the song. The second part of the Psalm says:

“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put Me to the test and put Me to the proof, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, ‘They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.’ Therefore I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

Failing to embrace God's promise is devastating. Psalm 106 begins with these well-known

words:

“Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!”

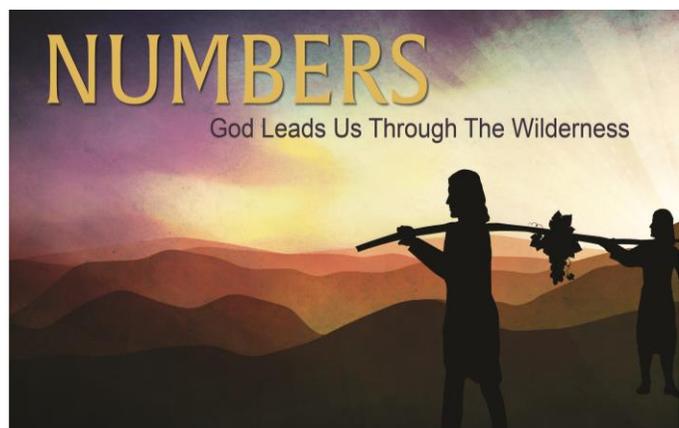
The song continues, though, to remember that we've sinned, and our fathers set out. They despise the pleasant land, having no faith in His promise. They murmured in their tents and did not obey the voice of the Lord. Paul makes use of Numbers extensively in 1 Corinthians 10. I know some of you may be falling into that temptation of thinking, the Israelites, they really failed. They always do, as though Christians are characterized by always trusting God. Paul makes extensive use of Numbers. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10, writing to Christians who are from different backgrounds, he says:

“For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did,. . . nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed.”

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, he says, referring to the events of the wilderness generation:

“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

This is the moment that we picked for our whole series, and it is a moment that I want to embed into your heart and into your soul. I love the prayer of Sir Francis Drake that Mike prayed at the beginning of the service: “Disturb us, Lord, until we move out from the intoxicating surrounding of comfort to follow You.” You’ll see in this image that the Land of Promise is out in the distance, and the glory of the Lord is shining behind. The Lord is with us. You will notice that there are just two in this picture. Twelve were sent, but there are just two. These two signify Joshua and Caleb in the narrative, and though the wilderness generation perishes, the inheritance is given to the children. These two, whose eyes are fixed on the Lord, make it. They follow, and this is a moment for us today. It's a moment that when we see the difficulties in our lives, when we see cultural challenges around us, we need to earnestly repent. We need to ask God's forgiveness



when we grumble and complain about the shifting culture around us and make that cause us to be passive with our faith. This happens to us. We say: "The obstacles are too great." We might label it as the spread of Islam. We might label it as a secularization. We might label it as consumerism. We might label it as: "I don't have any Christians in my school or my workplace." You might as well just say in scriptural categories: "The Canaanites live by the coast, and in the Jordan; the Amalekites are in the hill country. the Jebusites are there." But God has promised that if you have trusted in Jesus Christ, your name is on the deed of the new heavens and new earth with Him. This world, purified of evil, sin, and death, is part of our inheritance.

We already know the ending, and the ending is not that radical Islam that spreads and the world just vanishes. The ending of the story is, and let me state it clearly: "*Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*"! That is the ending. An innumerable multitude of redeemed from every nation will be gathered around the throne saying: "*Hallelujah, the Lord God Almighty reigns!*" That's the ending, and the promises are stated from of old. So, whatever situation you find yourself in, whatever cultural moment we find ourselves in, when you are standing at the edge of the promise and you can see the land, you can taste the pomegranate, you see the fig, **never** say: "The obstacle is too great, we are going back." Never say that! Can I just plead with you in this moment that we are alive? This is our only moment, and there is space that we are called to occupy, and the only way we can occupy it is by faith in God's promise and the certainty that He is with us. If anyone says to you that you can't do it, it's too hard, say: "God is with us! Don't be afraid. All of His promises are *yes* and *amen*." You can snuff out the firebrand of discouragement with the promises of God and move forward together to claim your inheritance. I don't want any of us in an unmarked grave in the wilderness. I want all of us standing in the land of the pomegranates and the figs and the grapes saying: All that He has said is true!" Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we extol You today. Oh, Lord, it is a sobering moment that we need to hear. Lord, the world around us at times can make us feel like grasshoppers. The cities seem to be fortified. The cultural institutions of the land seem to be in the hands of those who do not know You or seek to honor You. Lord, You have called us. You have made us righteous by faith in You. Lord, You have given us even greater evidence than the firstfruits in the death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior who is our Firstfruits of a New Creation. Lord, we ask for forgiveness now where we have spread a bad report, where we have discouraged a brother, a sister, a classmate, a parent, a colleague from following You wholeheartedly. Forgive us, Lord. Blot out our transgressions. Fill us anew and afresh with the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit that we might claim our inheritance, the portion that You assigned for our generation, that we would be faithful, that we would be named and remembered by You. Lord, we honor You and delight in You our strong and mighty God.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.