Being strong to go forward

notwithstanding the voices of negativity and discouragement

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Nov. 2023

Numbers13:30-32a **“Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.’**
But the men who had done up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we.’
And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out…”

What is opened up for us here

It is amazing what issues – *all to do with our own lives* – are touched upon and the insights about ourselves that this episode from our Bibles opens up for us.

But this is typical of the Word, throughout, in whatever book of the Word or place you look into; and we rightly expect it to be so.

What we see on the surface is no more or less than the tip of the iceberg. There is just so much underneath.

It is where and why we- and people more generally – can get it wrong, especially when it comes to the Old Testament. There is a fair percentage of it that reads – and comes across as being – dry as dust irrelevance, making no immediate or obvious connection with life as we face it, have to deal with it and are challenged by it, today. But go beyond the story and beneath the surface and it really begins to come alive for us.

Fundamental truths of our existence highlighted

As near as we can calculate, this story is all of three thousand, two hundred, years old. It is about the ancient people of Israel who, after some centuries of slavery in Egypt, escaped and, with Moses their leader out at front, began their journey to the Promised Land. Within weeks Moses sent ahead twelve scouts, or spies, to reconnoiter the land to which they were heading and which they had been promised, a land flowing with milk and honey. On their return, all twelve were glowing in their reports of the fertility and richness and beauty of the land, but while two (and just two) urged that they go confidently forward and that it was theirs for the taking, *with God's help,* the other ten spoke negatively, highlighting difficulties and persuading the people there was no way they could do it.

As we noted a moment ago, the story is near 3,200 years old. But beneath the surface it is right on target as to how it is so often with us.

Indeed, what is opened up, highlighted and brought home to us here is one of the great and fundamental truths of our existence.

We live in the midst of opposing influences and urgings impacting on us. These can of course be, *and often are*, from people, friends, and relatives and loved ones around us. But often overlooked are impulses reaching us from within. The thing is, we have all known our times when we have been buffeted and pulled one way or another. *'Shall I or shan't I?' 'Do I or am I better to leave it on one side?'*

All private, I am talking about here; known only to yourself; a wrestling match going on; and no one outside of you knows about it.

We nominate and identify certain goals or projects we would like to accomplish. It could be to lose weight, learn an instrument or acquire a new skill. One part of us is all enthusiasm, full of confidence, revved up at the thought of it. But then doubts and questions start finding their way in.

‘I’m being silly’

‘It’s too idealistic’

‘What thanks will I get from it anyway?’

‘And does anybody notice or care?’

In the midst of opposing influences from the spiritual world.

What comes across at first as utterly extraordinary is that we are not the source or origin of our thoughts and feelings. The reality is that all our thoughts and feelings are awakened and brought to our consciousness as the result of the activity of our unseen spiritual companions, angelic or heavenly spirits on the one hand and evil or devilish spirits on the other.

Being in the midst of their activity and influence, and carefully monitored and balanced as this activity and influence is, *by the Lord*, we are in freewill and able to choose which we will accede to, favour or give into.

From heaven is relayed to us all that is positive, upbeat, reassuring and affirming of what is possible.

From hell is relayed to us all that s negative, dark, discouraging and self-serving.

From heaven, and when it comes to the Lord, and His purposes for us come message of trust and confidence.

From hell, when it comes to the Lord and His purposes for us, come dispute and cynicism and defeatism.

There is in fact far more said about this, in the Bible, than is often realized. Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for son Isaac and promised him that the angel of the Lord would be with him and prosper his quest. (See Genesis 4:7)

When Jesus was tempted of the devil in the wilderness, at the end "*angels came and ministered unto Him*." (See Matthew 4:11).

Again, most of us can remember what Jesus said about children, that "*their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.*" (Matthew 18:10)

And whilst not immediately apparent, on the surface, Psalms 34 and 35 highlight this activity; Psalm 34 the activity of angels and Psalm 35 the activity of evil spirits.

Explains so much

That this is so explains so much.

It explains the battles that go on in our minds. It makes sense of how it comes about that we come to be so torn (and indecisive) within, between different directions, both of which beckon and both of which have appeal.

A surge of hope and optimism can be side lined by a different surge of doubt and pessimism. We ebb and flow in this regard.

Sometimes a wave of what is beautiful and inspiring descends upon us, while at another time a wave of what is ugly and what causes us to feel downcast descends upon us.

And isn’t it amazing that on one occasion a breakage or a set back is of no account to us and we wave it aside as being of no consequence. At another time annoyance and irritability are awakened and surge in.

The question is – and what is important – is that we then have to decide whether to give in and go along with that irritability and annoyance or make the greater effort required to shun it and to reclaim and affirm tolerance and mercy.

Especially when it comes to truths and goods

All of this - the ebb and the flow; the contrary influences at work; the voices having different messages for us and urging different ways ahead on us; *all of this* is especially and acutely so, and felt, when it comes to spiritual life and the person we are becoming within.

What is for sure is that peace, joy and contentment are all on offer. The Lord created us so that He might bless us. He wants us to see ourselves as people of worth. For this is what He created us to be. He is urgent for us to know and believe that we are all capable of nobility of behaviour, of thoughtfulness and restraint. *This* is the Promised Land. *This* is the land of milk and honey; of release and freedom from our small-mindedness and addiction to what is material, natural and external and narrowly self-focused.

Everyone subscribes to this

What is interesting is that everyone subscribes to this as an ideal. Remember? All twelve of the spies said what a beautiful land the Promised Land was and would be.

Is there a person anywhere, we might well ask:

who does not want peace to reign across the world?

The end of conflict; of roadside bombs which kill and maim?

Who doesn't aspire to live contentedly and happily?

We all do, of course.

Our modern day heroes tend to be the people who, in their lives and behaviour, have exhibited these qualities. We look up to them and are inspired by their vision and dedication to achieve that vision.

But it is of course a different story when it comes to us. One the one hand we hear voices within which tell us we can do it, and have it, and on the other hand we hear the voices of negativity and defeatism.

***'It's all pie in the sky*!'**

'*It's good in theory, but let's be practical!'*

'The world just doesn't work like that!'

And, more personally, we get unwanted reminders of our failures and shortcomings; times we have slipped up, let ourselves down, given in when we should have held on.

Trawling for ammunition

As the teaching in Swedenborg's Writings highlight, this – indeed – is a particularly potent strategy of evil spirits in their quest to have us succumb, give up, surrender to what is selfishly satisfying, that they trawl through our memories for those very lapses just mentioned and with which, they "*accuse and condemn"* us. (See Arcana Caelestia 6202:2 and 8159).

As a consequence we feel further weakened and more dispirited than ever.

So, what was the difference?

So, what was the difference, the two as against the other ten? The optimists and the pessimists? Those who urged confidence as compared with those who spoke of certain defeat and pointlessness, even before they tried?

The thing is*, the* ten looked only to their own resources and, seeing weakness, urged it would be suicidal to try. *The two* who urged confidence and pleaded with the people to go forward had in mind not just their own very limited resources but the reality that the Lord would be with them and give them the resolve, strategies, determination and perseverance to succeed.

If we look to our own scant resources, how weak we are; how weak we have been; our poor track record; how irresolute we can be; how formidable the opposition seems; how steep the hill to climb seems to be; how entrenched old mind sets are; we cannot but give up and give in before we start.

If, however, we accept that, yes, we have no strength of our own but that the Lord is with us; has blessed us to this point; and will be with us as we go forward, bringing His strength and resources to bear on our behalf, the Promised Land of heavenly living will be ours.

May we all be strong to go forward notwithstanding the voices of negativity and discouragement which otherwise, if given into, so hold us back.

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But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.’

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Amen

Readings:

Matthew Chapter 17, verses 14 to 20
Numbers Chapter 13, verses 1 to 3; 17 to 21; and verse 25: also Chapter 14, verse 1

Arcana Caelestia 2338

"Temptations involve feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, and also regarding His salvation. The evil spirits who are present with a person at such times and who are the causes of the temptation do all they can to infuse a negative outlook, but good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving a feeling of hope and in the end strengthening an affirmative outlook. Consequently a person undergoing temptation hangs between a negative and an affirmative outlook. Anyone who gives way in temptation remains in a doubting, and sinks into a negative, frame of mind, whereas one who overcomes still experiences feelings of doubt; yet he who allows himself to be filled with hope remains in an affirmative outlook."

Arcana Caelestia 8670

"People who are being tempted are involved in toil against falsities and evils, and also the angels are involved in toil together with them to maintain them in faith and so in the power to be victorious."

THE END