winning the battle over a bad attitude

Numbers 13:25-33 (NKJV)

Tonight, in our ninth and final message in our series on WINNING LIFE’S BATTLES, we are going to be looking at a common battle we have all struggled with at times, and myself included. I’m talking about THE BATTLE OVER A BAD ATTITUDE.

There are many “types of bad attitudes.” But for our thoughts tonight we are going to focus specifically on “the negative attitude.” The “negative attitude” is a poisonous, toxic blend of doubt......and fear......and pessimism......and skepticism......and discontent......and faithlessness.

WHAT IS AN ATTITUDE?

Our attitude has to do with the way we think and the way we respond to our circumstances......our responsibilities....our work....our problems.....our successes and failures.....and our personal relationships with our fellow man and our relationship with our heavenly Father.

There is no area of our lives that isn't affected by our attitude. This is why the Bible warns us over and over again about our thought life.

Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) “For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”
Simply put that verse is telling us “You are what you think.” “You are the product of your own thought-life.” “You and I are the products of our attitude.” I heard David Jeremiah give an interesting interpretation of this verse in one of his messages several weeks ago. It was so good I wrote it down in my Bible. It goes like this……

“You aren't what you think you are, BUT WHAT YOU THINK...... YOU ARE.”

You aren’t a loser, but if you think you are a loser, you will live like a loser. You aren’t a failure, but if you think you are a failure, you will live like a failure. You don’t really have the whole world against you, but if you think you do, you will live like a victim. You don’t really have more problems than everybody else, but if you think you do, you will live like a poor, pitiful, pathetic individual.

We are the product of our own thoughts. “For as a man thinks IN HIS heart, so is he.” That means one’s attitude is one’s own personal choice. You own your attitude and I own mine.

Do you have a negative attitude? Are you a “glass half empty” kind of person? Do you look at the world through shattered glasses?

In tonight’s message we are going to be looking at a passage of scripture that perhaps illustrates the stark contrast between a positive attitude and a negative attitude more than any other passage of scripture in all the Bible. And as you are going to see, there is a very close connection between OUR FAITH and OUR ATTITUDE.

Please turn with me to NUMBERS chapter thirteen. And let’s begin reading in VERSE 25 to the end of the chapter.
26 Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.
27 Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.
28 Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there.
29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.”

30 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.”
31 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.”
32 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature.
33 There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”
It has now been fourteen months since the exodus from Egypt. You would think after 430 years of captivity in Egypt that the Israelites would be excited and optimistic about the new life that awaited them in the Promised Land. But that wasn’t the case.

In the fourteen months since the exodus, a serious problem has been brewing. There is widespread negativity, and pessimism, and skepticism throughout the whole Israelite camp. The Israelites are griping and complaining about everything! Moses is now leading 1 1/2 to 2 million people with SERIOUSLY BAD ATTITUDES!

Remember when they were under the harsh task-masters back in Egypt they had begged GOD to send them a deliverer. GOD heard their cries and sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt and back to the land God had promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now they are griping and complaining about Moses leadership, even begging him to take them back to EGYPT.

At Merah in the Wilderness of Shur, the people complained about the bitter water and GOD turned the waters sweet to quench their thirst. Later at Rephidim the Israelites complained once again about not having water to drink. GOD instructed Moses to go on ahead of the people to Mount Horeb and strike a rock; and when he did a steady stream of water came flowing out of the rock which would provide the Israelites with more than enough water to drink. Did that change their BAD ATTITUDES? NO! They just found something else to gripe and complain about.
THEY GRIPED AND COMPLAINED ABOUT NOT HAVING ANYTHING TO EAT so GOD provided them with “manna”.......
“the bread of heaven.” All they had to do was go out and pick it up off the ground every morning. Did that change their BAD ATTITUDES? NO! They just found something new to gripe and complain about.

THEY GRIPED AND COMPLAINED ABOUT NOT HAVING ANY MEAT TO EAT to go along with their manna. Listen to what Moses told the Israelites, I LOVE THIS…….

NUMBERS 11:18b-20 (NKJV) “Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.” Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. 19 You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, 20 but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?””

That day GOD sent a strong wind across the Mediterranean Sea that blew quail to within about a day's journey of the Israelite camp. And Numbers 11:31 tells us God provided them with so many quail they were stacked up two cubits high or three feet deep. DID THAT CHANGE THEIR BAD ATTITUDES? NO! They just found something else to gripe and complain about.

Even Aaron and Miriam, Moses' own brother and sister griped and complained about his leadership. And God was so angry He afflicted Miriam with leprosy.
Let me just stop right here and point out a couple of important truths we need to grasp.

**TRUTH #1:** You can never satisfy someone with a BAD ATTITUDE!

No matter how much GOD blessed the Israelites they still weren't satisfied. They always found something else to gripe and complain about.

What was true of the ancient Israelites is still true today. Think of people you know personally who have a really bad, negative attitude. No matter what you do to try to please them or appease them, no matter what you do to try to make them happy, **nothing ever satisfies them, does it? You give them what they want and they still have a rotten attitude.**

Think of all the time and energy we waste trying to satisfy people with lousy attitudes. Its an exercise in futility! GOD HIMSELF could not satisfy those “bad attitude Israelites!”
TRUTH #2: Bad attitudes are highly contagious!

Did it ever occur to you that all that negativity in the Israelite camp started with just one person. We don’t know who that person was but it probably all started with a conversation something like this: One person says, “What do you think of Moses?” The other person says, “Whataya mean?” The first person says, “Well, do you think he’s the right guy to be leading us?” He’s been leading us in circles in this wilderness for months now like he doesn’t know what he’s doing.” The other person says, “Well I haven’t really given it much thought, but maybe you’re right. Maybe Moses isn’t the one who should be leading us.”

And then those two people talk to two more people......and those two people talk to two more people.....and before you know it the whole Israelite camp is ready to oust Moses and get a new leader.
We must never underestimate the seriousness of a negative attitude. A negative attitude is like a toxic poison that spreads through the bloodstream. A negative attitude spreads from one person to another and before you know realize it, that negative attitude has spread throughout the workplace....or throughout the whole school....or throughout the whole ball team.....or even throughout the whole Church. All it takes is one person with “a chip on their shoulder” or “a burr in their saddle” to dampen the spirits of an entire group of people.

A negative attitude is lethal....its toxic.....its poison.....and it is greatly displeasing to GOD!

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TRANSITION BACK TO NUMBERS 13  
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Now I realize I have taken you the long way around to get back to our text in Numbers chapter thirteen. But the knowledge of that background information will help you better understand the significance of Moses sending the twelve spies into the land of Canaan.
When we read verses 1,2 it sounds as though it was GOD’S idea to have Moses send **the twelve spies on this mission.**

Numbers 13:1,2  And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.”

But if you will turn over just a few pages to **Deuteronomy 1** we will discover who's idea it really was to send the spies into Canaan.

Deuteronomy 1:20-22 (NKJV)  And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’ “And every one of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’

You see, it wasn't God's idea to send the twelve spies, nor was it really Moses' idea. This idea originated with **the negative, pessimistic people with a bad attitude.** They have whined and complained and griped so much, they aren't even sure at this point if they even want to go into the Promised Land. This idea to send twelve spies into the land isn't motivated by faith it is motivated by fear, and pessimism, and doubt. This idea is fueled by a negative attitude.
In our English translations it seems as though Moses was sending these men on a “spy” mission, but the original Hebrew language paints a totally different picture.

The Hebrew word for “spy” is *leragel* which means “to observe secretly with hostile intent.” If someone “hacks” into your computer what are they doing? They are *spying*....they are observing your secret information with the hostile intent of doing harm to you by stealing your vital information.”

Moses never instructed the twelve men to “*leragel*” or to “spy out the land with hostile intent.” Moses instructed the twelve men to “*latur*” which the Hebrew word for “explore.” When you “explore” something you examine it for the purpose of discovery.”

All Moses wanted the twelve spies to do was to “explore the Promised Land for the purpose of discovery.” All he wanted was “factual information” about what they saw. Listen carefully!

Moses never asked these men to come back with an assessment or determination as to whether or not the land could be conquered.

That matter was already settled by GOD. GOD had promised the land to them and whether or not the land was conquerable was never even an issue. All these twelve men were supposed to do was bring back factual information on what they saw.......PERIOD!

Well, the men were gone for forty days and nights. And as we pick up the record in verse 27 and following we first hear from the ten faithless spies with negative attitudes.
NUMBERS 13:27-30 (NKJV)  Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.”

Caleb immediately sees right through what these negative spies are trying to do. He knows they are “sowing seeds of doubt” in the minds of the people in order to strike fear in their hearts. Did they succeed? You better believe it! Look at the first part of verse 30....... 30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses.........

The fact that Caleb had to “quiet the people” tells us the negative thinking has quickly spread among the people. The ten spies have succeeded in putting “the first cracks in the foundation of the Israelites faith.”

But notice what Caleb says in verse 30, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” Basically what Caleb was saying was, “I'm ready to go claim our land right now...... anybody with me?”

Before the people can even respond, the ten spies quickly “swooped in” and did what negative people always do, THEY THREW COLD WATER ON CALEB’S CHALLENGE TO DAMPEN THE SPIRITS OF THE PEOPLE.
Numbers 13:31-33 (NKJV) 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.” And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

Remember I told you earlier Moses sent them on this mission to “explore the land” not make a determination as to whether or not it could be conquered. The land was conquerable! The land already belonged to them. Victory was already assured, BECAUSE GOD PROMISED! But look at what the ten negative spies said in v.31....

“We are NOT ABLE!” Caleb and Joshua saw the same giants and the same fortified cities and said, “WE ARE ABLE!”

* The ten guys with NEGATIVE ATTITUDES said, “We can’t” The two guys with POSITIVE ATTITUDES FOUNDED ON FAITH said, “We can .”

* The ten guys with NEGATIVE ATTITUDES focused on “The problem.” The two guys with POSITIVE ATTITUDES OF FAITH focused on THE PROMISE OF GOD.

* The ten guys with NEGATIVE ATTITUDES focused on man's weakness. The two guys with POSITIVE ATTITUDES OF FAITH focused on GOD'S STRENGTH!
Listen closely! The real giants weren't the ones living in the land. The real giant was the one living in the minds and hearts of those ten negative spies and all the Israelites who listen to them. Their own negative attitude.....their “attitude of faithlessness” was the giant that stood between them and the Promised Land.

As it turned out that was the first and last time those ten men would ever set foot in the Promised Land. God afflicted them with a plague and everyone of them died; as did every Israelite who was over the age of twenty when they left Egypt.

APPLICATION

We may view a negative attitude as nothing more than a bad outlook on life or excuse it as one's “natural temperament.” But in the eyes of GOD, a negative attitude is a sin. A negative attitude is “a sign of faithlessness.” So perhaps you are wondering, “HOW DO I WIN THE BATTLE OVER A BAD ATTITUDE?” “Is it even possible to totally change the way I think”” The good news is “YES!” Yes it is possible to completely change the way you think.

(1) First of all, PRAY for God's RENEWAL of your MIND.

Romans 12:1,2 (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
Changing from faithless thinking to faith-filled thinking is an inside job. It means surrendering your mind to the power of God’s Holy Spirit and allowing Him to “renew” or totally transform the way you think. And as the Holy Spirit renews your mind, you as well as everyone around will begin to notice a remarkable change in your attitude.

(2) **Discipline Your Mind to replace **NEGATIVE** thoughts with **POSITIVE** thoughts.

**PHILIPPIANS 4:8 (NKJV)** Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

You can’t overcome a negative attitude by saying, “Ok, I’m going to stop thinking negative thoughts.” You have to replace the negative thoughts with positive thoughts. You have to feed your mind on those things which honor, and glorify GOD. You have to replace unwholesome, poison thoughts with wholesome, healthy thoughts.

(3) **Stop complaining about all your PROBLEMS and start PRAISING God!**

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NKJV)** Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is the will of GOD in Christ Jesus for you.
Have you ever noticed how rarely you hear words of praise or gratitude coming from the lips of people with a negative attitude. Typically all you hear are gripes and complaints about all their troubles, and all the things that are going wrong in their life, and all their aches and pains. No wonder they're miserable.

If you will stop complaining about all your problems and start praising GOD and thanking GOD for your blessings, the Holy Spirit will bring about a remarkable change in your attitude!

(4) And one final thing. Determine to be an “I CAN” Christian!

*Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)*  “I CAN do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Stop telling yourself, “I can't do this” or “I can't do that” and start preaching this truth to yourself over and over again, “I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO GIVES ME THE STRENGTH.”
I leave you with this closing thought.....

Your attitude is either your best friend........or your worst enemy. It will either draw people to you........or drive people away from you. Your attitude is the librarian of your past................the speaker of your present...............and the prophet of your future.   ---John Maxwell

Every day when you get out of bed you will choose your attitude for that day. Choose wisely! Choose an attitude that bring glory and honor to GOD!

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