

THE GRASSHOPPER COMPLEX

"And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." Numbers 13:33.

God had prepared Moses for the task of emancipating His people. When this task was completed, they were led through the wilderness. As they journeyed God provided food, drink, and clothing for them, and protected them from their enemies. God told them about the excellence of the land toward which they were journeying, promised that He would guide them to it, give them possession of it, and then commanded them to take it. So far as God was concerned, this land of safety, sufficiency, and satisfaction was already theirs, but it was to become theirs in actual possession through simple faith and obedience on their part.

Instead of doing as God had commanded them upon their arrival at the border, they requested Moses to appoint an appraisal committee to spy out the land. Was it God's will that Moses should grant their request, and send forth spies? God's directive will was, "Believe what I have said, enter and take possession." However, in response to their request, His permissive will was, "Send men ... search the land ... see the people ... and the cities."

Twelve leading men were chosen for this task. Each was a man of distinction, discretion and influence in the tribe over which he presided as a prince. These men were chosen because of their physical endurance, quickness of eye, tact in emergencies and good judgment of land and people. However, only two of them were men of faith in God, and with strong convictions as to the destiny of Israel. They were instructed to spy out the land, to return with samples of the fruit, and to bring information about the cities and the type of dwellings found therein. They were told to observe closely and accurately, and then to report in detail.

Thus commissioned, the twelve spies set out on their journey. Passing through the whole country from the south to the north, they did their work thoroughly. After a search of forty days, the spies returned and reported that they had found a land of magic charms, luscious fruits, alluvial soil, and marvelous advantages. In their report there was unanimous agreement that the Promised Land was glorious and desirable, but there their agreement ended. The majority report was submitted by ten members of the committee. The minority report was submitted by two of the committee.

With difficulty Caleb got permission to submit the minority report. He and Joshua wisely kept the allurements of the Promised Land before the people, realizing that longings often overcome cowardly fears. These men of faith did not minimize the difficulties, but they magnified God. Their report said, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." Their faith, which was expressed in these words, was not natural optimism, but an expression of real trust in God. They knew that the people of Canaan were strong, the cities great, and the enemies many, but they firmly believed that God was stronger, greater and all-sufficient. They were convinced that to bring God into the scene would change the strength of their enemies into weakness and the weakness of the Israelites into strength. It is indeed fortunate that God always has some faithful servants and witnesses.

After the majority had testified to the fertility of the land, and to the abundance of the luscious fruits and delightful things to eat, they set forth the difficulties in the way of taking the land. The obstacles which seemed insuperable to them were the fortified cities and the strength and stature of the inhabitants. In forming their conclusions and in delivering their report, they made the tragic mistake of leaving out or ignoring God. Their report was based solely upon what they saw with their own eyes. They had a keen sense of their difficulties, but they did not take into account the presence, the power,

and the promise of God. To judge by appearances only, or to trust our own reasonings rather than the Word of God, is foolish, sinful and perilous.

The counsel of the majority was along this line: "The task is impossible. The people are stronger than we are. The men are giants. They made us feel like grasshoppers, and grasshoppers we are to them." They saw the giants, but they did not see the Lord. Possessed by an excessive and debilitating self-depreciation, they said, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers." They did not feel any more competent to capture the citadel of the enemy than the grasshoppers were able to subdue a fort.

These spies were wrong in underestimating themselves. They were suffering from a grasshopper complex. A man who is obsessed by fears feels exceedingly insignificant. He is as a grasshopper in his own sight, and other fallible human beings appear to him as though they were giants. There are very few of us who do not allow fears to impede our effectiveness. Perfectly well men and women worry about being attacked by this or that disease. In the night when the fires of vitality burn low it is easy for us to toss upon our beds and imagine all kinds of impending misfortunes.

Inferiority feelings are not to be confused with true humility. Humility is that delightful consciousness that there is ample power available for life, but that its origin is not in ourselves. Christ never had any sense of inferiority or inadequacy. He was master of life, but He was humble. When the audience swept Handel to his feet after the first rendition of The Messiah, he pointed upward and cried, "It came from above!" If you were the engineer at Niagara Falls sitting in a room releasing half a million horsepower by your lever, you would not feel inferior, nor would you feel proud. It would not be your power; you would only be the means of releasing it.

This haunting sense of inadequacy can be the creative source of significant achievement. Men and women have made wonderful compensations because of a genuine inadequacy in their lives.

What are some of the symptoms which reveal inferiority? The obvious characteristics of shivering and whining before life are not true symptoms. Those spies did not outwardly pity themselves. The cities were fortified; the inhabitants were giants; they were being realists. They implied, "Give us somebody our own size, and we'll show you what we can do." Defensive or compensatory behavior is the usual method of combating and concealing our sense of inadequacy. Another curious manifestation is the habit of boasting, or lying. Excessive humility also reveals it. Susceptibility to flattery may disclose a basic feeling of inferiority. Resentment of criticism may indicate it too. Criticism of others without intellectual appraisal may be a manifestation. Cherishing hatred of another frequently has its root in jealousy, which in turn is caused by this baneful feeling of inferiority. Excessive day-dreaming is another means by which we escape our limitations and retreat to the delights of imaginary achievements.

That which undermines a person's faith in himself is to be avoided as a noisome pestilence. Now and then we meet somebody who impresses us as having built a mighty structure of pride on an exceedingly flimsy foundation, but more lives are ruined by self-distrust than by overconfidence. Very often the boaster is merely whistling to keep up his own courage. The men who felt like grasshoppers in the presence of giants lacked the first essential of making good soldiers. It is a certainty that when people think of themselves as grasshoppers that others will do likewise.

The grasshopper complex is invariably a handicap to efficiency. It vitiates one's intellectual honesty. We are afraid of our thoughts. Instead of facing the facts of life and thinking them through for ourselves and arriving at a correct conclusion, we let the addleheaded crowd make our decisions for us. We are frequently disloyal to the right because of our fear of the criticism of some human grasshopper whom we take to be

a giant. Some of the most essential work for human betterment is being left undone because those who should be doing it are afflicted with the grasshopper complex.

What causes a person to have a grasshopper or inferiority complex? One of the causes may be a physical handicap. The anti-social behavior of Zacchaeus before Christ saved and transformed him may be traced in large measure to his short stature. He was a little man, and whatever he said was always discounted by his stature. He may have had daring dreams of social usefulness, but unfortunately the moment he stood up to expound his plans people started to laugh and make fun. Zacchaeus took revenge upon the society that disdained him by selling himself to the Roman government as a tax-collector. He lowered himself deliberately so that he could dominate his own people. He grew rich, and people began to notice him. They decided that after all he was worth cultivating. A child that has some physical handicap may be coddled by his family and thereby made to feel different and inferior.

Parents and teachers contribute to this feeling of inadequacy by the use of comparisons. A mother may compare two of her children by saying that one of them takes after me and always makes high grades in school, but the other one is like his dad and barely makes a passing grade. If you compare a child unfairly with his brother or sister, you lay the foundation for trouble later.

One who has frequent disappointments is likely to feel inwardly whipped and inadequate. To have confidence in one's self it is necessary to have some successes. Every child should be guided into some worthwhile activities which are certain to bring some degree of success. One should never overemphasize the lack of advantages.

Misguided ambition too can be a fruitful cause of an inferiority or grasshopper complex. Trying to do what one cannot hope to do well tends to create inner discontent. Vocational misfits so often feel like saying, "We are as grasshoppers in the presence of giants."

Deepest of all causes of a grasshopper complex may be a consciousness of guilt, real or imaginary. A person who knows that he has committed sin, and has not experienced God's forgiveness, can be haunted by this feeling in a dreadful way.

Have we been "long on diagnosis and short on cure?" This is a condition that is curable, and much can be done to release you from this spiritual disease. It may be that your escape from the grasshopper complex will come through a frank and honest appraisal of your limitations and your abilities. Remember that every child of God has a elements of weakness and of strength. Discover your abilities and do not wait until life reveals them. Then use them for the glory of God and the good of others.

Excel in something. It may be in cooking, sewing, arranging flowers, typing, writing, or selling. The Lord may never have intended you to be an orator, but perhaps He has given you a real organizing ability. If you are not an all-round athlete, you may become a first-rate scholar.

If you would overcome the feeling of inferiority, attach yourself to a great cause. When a person identifies himself with something greater than himself he comes to represent something worthwhile, and no inferiority complex can survive that. Peter, who had a real sense of moral inferiority, said "Depart from me O Lord, for I am a sinful man," but he was captivated by the Master. Christ said, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." Peter followed Christ, became adequate and did a great work for the Lord. Most of the first disciples, taken one by one, like many of His later ones, in and of themselves did not amount to much. But they identified themselves with the wonderful Saviour and His great cause and thus their lives became significant and glorious. This great Master says to you, "Come after me and I will make you."

In striving to master the art of right living, let us heed the admonition of Stonewall Jackson in his motto, "Do your duty and leave the rest to providence." He who remembers that, if we will do our part, God will not fail to do His part, will not dissipate his energy and his talents in cowering in the shadow of fancied fears. In the chaos of modern life, in a time when it seems so hard to find a path to the goal, the words of the psalmist come with a power which puts faith in the heart and strength in the life: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).