

Preparing For A New Beginning

Sermon 10 - Leaving Our Mark, Joshua 14

Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church, May 28, 2006

—

As a Christian have you ever wondered if your life really makes a difference? You're in the background, the things you do seem to go unnoticed or forgotten, and so you wonder if it's even worth continuing.

I've got a feeling Caleb could have felt that very way. Even though his name is hardly mentioned in the scriptures he was equal to Joshua in many ways, and probably better in some. But Joshua was the leader, the one that was always in the spotlight. While most of what Caleb did was behind the scenes. Doing those things that went unnoticed, things that were often forgotten.

And yet, Caleb is remembered as one of the great men of Old Testament times. I believe if you and I would follow his example we would also leave our mark in the world today.

I'd like you to open your Bible to Joshua 14. Here we discover 3 keys to Caleb's success.

Verses 6-8 present the first key:

I. Caleb had faith in the power of God.

Read Joshua 14:6-8...

The people of Israel are back in Gilgal. The major battles are over and the strongholds of the Canaanites have been defeated. Joshua is preparing to divide the land as an inheritance among the people and just as they are ready to start Caleb steps forward and reminds Joshua of the past. He goes back to when he was 40 years old, to a time that only he and Joshua could remember because everyone else with them at the time have since died in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb along with ten other men, one from each tribe, had been chosen by Moses at Kadesh barnea to cross the Jordan and spy out the land of Canaan. Caleb highlights the report that followed, but I'd like

you to see it in Numbers 13:26-31...

Caleb says that this report came from his heart. Even though everyone else's heart melted because of fear, Caleb firmly believed they could go in and take the land. This belief caused him and Joshua to respond differently than all the rest. It says in our passage that he "*wholly followed the Lord.*"

Caleb's belief enabled him to stand with God even though it meant -

First, he was in the minority. The other spies had already given their report and one by one it was negative. They believe the enemy was too strong for them and that they could not take the land. Then it was Caleb's turn. The majority had already spoken and were unified in the report and so the pressure was on. But in full control of himself Caleb quieted the people and gave a report that was the very opposite of the majority. He said that they could take the land. That took courage.

I'm sure you have already learned by experience, whether you're a young person or an adult, just how hard it is to go against peer pressure. That's why I did some of the dumb things I did as a teenager. I didn't want to be different than the rest. It's a lot easier to side with the majority, to compromise your convictions, than it is to stay in the minority. Haven't you found that to be true? That sometimes it's easier at work, at school, or with friends just to keep quiet than it is to open your mouth and let people know you believe differently. That takes courage. Caleb had that kind of courage because of what he believed.

Second, Caleb was rejected. When Caleb and Joshua tried to convince the people not to turn away from the Lord, in Numbers 14 we learn the whole congregation became angry and cried out in unison, "*Stone them!*" Not many of us have had our lives threatened because of our stand for God but let's face it, none of us like to be rejected. The fear of rejection will often keep us from doing what we know God wants us to do. Haven't you ever failed to witness to someone because you were afraid of what they would think or how they would react?

The fear of rejection is a powerful force and it takes courage to overcome it. Caleb had that kind of courage, but what was it that enabled him to have it? Why was he able to say what was in his heart? Why was he able to take the minority position? Why was he able to deal with rejection? Why was he able

to wholly follow the Lord, when the rest of Israel turned away in fear? I believe it was because Caleb had faith in the power of God.

It wasn't the power of positive thinking. It wasn't that he minimized the problems. He knew that the giants and fortified cities were real problems. But for Caleb God was bigger than the biggest problem and so that's where he was going to put his trust.

As a believer how big is your God? Is He bigger than your problem's? Is He bigger than your difficulties? Is He bigger than the obstacles that you have to overcome? In Ephesians 3:20 the Apostle Paul says that God, "*is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.*" He is able to do all, above all, abundantly above all. Exceedingly abundantly above all! There are simply no limits to what God is able to do and when we firmly believe that in our heart as a Christian, our life is going to leave its mark in this world. It is going to make a difference.

There is a second key to Caleb's success -

II. Caleb had faith in the promise of God.

Read Joshua 14:9-11...

Back in Kadesh Barnea God made a special promise to Caleb. It is given for us here in verse 9...

That promise must have been exciting for Caleb but there was a catch, he would have to wait for it. For most of us waiting is one of our greatest enemies. We don't want to have to wait for anything and I speak from personal experience. I don't even like to wait even when I am only the second one in line at the grocery store. But just think of Caleb, his wait meant 45 years of wandering in the wilderness. 45 long dreary weary years in the desert often without water and eating the same food day in and day out: manna for breakfast, manna for lunch, and manna for supper.

His wait meant watching as friends and family died one by one until eventually just he and Joshua were the only ones left from their generation. Most of us don't know what that's like, but it can be a very discouraging thing to be the only one left from the days of your youth.

His wait also meant the lost of his youth because now instead of being 40, Caleb is 85 years old. How many of us would want to wait until we were 85 to finally settle down in our own place?

His wait also meant fighting those difficult battles for the land of Canaan in his early 80's rather than his early 40's. Today, we don't think of our 70's or 80's as a time of fighting but as a time of retiring or resting. We don't think of those later years as years of continuing the struggle, but there was Caleb still fighting.

You know what else must have been in the back of his mind throughout all those years of wandering? *"I could have already been in the land if it wasn't for the disobedience of the rest."* Instead of taking his inheritance at 85 he could have had it at 40 had it not been for the sin of others. How easy it could have been for resentment and bitterness to build throughout those years of waiting. To wait is hard enough but to have to wait when it's not even your fault is too much for most of us to bear. But apparently Caleb never became bitter. Apparently he never gave up but instead faithfully continued doing his part behind the scenes.

What was it that could enable a man to continue waiting faithfully for so many years without the bitterness, the impatience, and the complaining that so many of us experience? I believe it was this- Caleb had faith in the promise of God.

Throughout all the years, all the difficulties, and all the battles, God's promise sustained him. So that now, instead of an old winkled and bitter man we find a man with the promise of God on his lips and the vitality of God in his life. Look at verses 10-11...

As a Christian, what effect does waiting on God have on you? In 1 John 5:14-15 it tells us...

Have you ever claimed that promise and then had to wait for the answer? How did you respond?

In Matthew 6 Jesus says that our heavenly Father knows...

Have you ever claimed that promise and put Him first in your life and still had to wait before He met your need? How did you respond?

In 2 Peter 3 Peter responds to the scoffers of his day and ours who question the promise of our Lord's return. He says, "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise.*" He isn't just taking His time, He isn't playing with our mind, and He isn't being unfair. His delay has a purpose, which is for our good. Many of us never experience that because we lose faith in God's promise just like the people of Israel did. It's the person who keeps their faith in God's promise that leaves their mark in this world. That is the person that makes a difference.

There is still a third key to Caleb's success that I want you to see -

III. Caleb had faith in the presence of God.

Read Joshua 14:12-15...

When Caleb said, "*I want that mountain!*", he was laying claim to God's promise, but there was nothing easy about his request.

First, It was uphill all the way. Located directly west of the Dead Sea, it rose 4100 feet above the Dead Sea. Just climbing it would leave most of us exhausted. Caleb was 85.

Second, It was the home of Anakim. These were the giants that the spies were afraid of in Numbers 13, that caused them to appear as grasshoppers in their own eyes. But Caleb's view of the giants had not changed over the years. They were not obstacles to his faith as a 40 year old man, and now they were still not obstacles as an 85 year old man.

Third, These giants lived in great fortified cities, cities just like Jericho and Ai, with walls so high that they are described in Deuteronomy 1 as reaching up to heaven.

And so, at the age of 85 when Caleb might have asked for a quiet place to spend his last days, he requested instead that which God wanted him to have with all of its struggles and all of its difficulties. But why? What would prompt a man of his age to reach so high and go against such seemingly impossible odds? Was it pride or self-confidence? Not at all. Caleb had faith in the presence of God.

In verse 12 Caleb said...

The words, “*If so be*” were not words of doubt but instead of humility. He knew that he was unworthy. Even as one that had wholly followed the Lord, he knew that he didn’t deserve God’s presence in his life. But he also knew that if the Lord was with him there was nothing that could stop him, not the mountain, not the giants, and not the walled cities. As a result, in chapter 15 we discover that of all the people of Israel who received an inheritance, it was this man who had waited 45 years, this man who walked in the shadow of Joshua’s fame, this man who now had reached an age deserving rest, this man was the one out of all the other people who succeeded in expelling the enemy and taking full possession of his inheritance.

As you look ahead into chapters 16-19, you discover over and over again that the other people of Israel were not able to drive out the enemy completely, but Caleb drove out all the enemy from his inheritance.

As a Christian, is that the kind of faith you have? When God says, “*do not fear for I am with you*”, is that enough for you? That’s the kind of faith it takes to leave a lasting mark in this world. That’s what it takes to make a difference!

Caleb, like the Apostle Paul, was able to say, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*” (2 Timothy 4:7)

Is that the way you want to finish out your life? Well, it’s not too late! You can start today by exercising faith in the power of God, faith in the promise of God, and faith in the presence of God.