

3rd May 2020

The Caleb Generation

Joshua 14:6-14

We come to the third of our Old Testament character studies. We have briefly looked at Moses and Joshua, and today we look at one of my favourite Bible characters Caleb. It is my intention during this series to give an over view of their lives, reflect upon lessons we can learn from their lives, but above all, highlight ordinary people living extraordinary lives.

Read: Joshua 14:6-14

We examine Caleb's personal story of conquest – one that has been 45 years in the making. At 85 years of age Caleb says in v12 *"Give me this mountain, or give me this hill country that the Lord promised me.."*

Now, I appreciate Caleb and his exploits more today than I did 20 years ago. After all, I'm only around 8 years behind Caleb, and I'm closing the gap every day.

Someone said old age is when you've got it all together, but you can't remember where you put it. Well, let's talk about Caleb, an old man who had it all together, and knew where he put it!

One of the 12 Original Spies (Numbers 13-14)

The first time we meet Caleb, the people of Israel are encamped at Kadesh Barnea, an oasis in the Negev desert south of the Promised Land. It has been only a year or two since they have come out of Egypt. The people have seen many miracles in that time -- the Red Sea opening, water from the rock, and manna to feed a multitude. They've fought the Amalekite raiders and won. Moses has received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and destroyed the golden calf. The Israelites have ratified the Covenant, built the Tabernacle, and constructed the Ark of the Covenant. The essentials of their nationhood under God as their King have been established. It is now time to enter the Promised Land.

At that time, Caleb is about 40 years old, and a recognized leader of his tribe, the tribe of Judah, the largest of the twelve tribes. The Lord has given Moses this directive:

"Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders." (Numbers 13:2)

So, Caleb and eleven of his peers are sent on a reconnaissance mission into Canaan. They go north along the ridge of mountains that provide the backbone of the country, from Hebron in the south all the way to Rehob at the north end of the land.

Perhaps they are posing as traders; we don't know. Along the way they observe carefully what they see: the nature of the cities and villages and their fortifications, the produce of the land and its potential. Since they will be dividing up the land between the twelve tribes, it is important that representatives from all the tribes be in on this initial survey of the land.

But they are particularly impressed with the city of Hebron, a walled city in the south, perched nearly at the crest of the mountain chain at about 3,000 feet elevation. It is an ancient city, built seven years prior to Zoan in Egypt (which places its founding at about 1700 BC).

What the spies see sobers them. For in this strongly fortified city live a race of giant men called the descendants of Anak, the Anakites or the Anakim.

When the spies return, they carry a huge cluster of grapes -- the fruit of the land -- on a pole between them. They talk about the abundance of the land, "it does flow with milk and honey." But ten of the spies are clearly frightened by the prospect of conquest.

"The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." (Numbers 13:28, 33)

The "bad report" of the ten spies is contagious. By nightfall, their negative assessment of the danger has spread throughout the camp, and with it the infectious fear of these tribal leaders. "That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud" (Numbers 14:1). Women were sobbing that their husbands would be killed in battle and their children left fatherless. By morning, the men were ready to rebel, select another leader, and return to Egypt.

Two of the spies disagreed. Joshua and Caleb saw what the others saw, but they also remembered God's promise to go with them and give them victory. Because the people gave in to their fear, they were sentenced to wander for 40 years in the wilderness where the unbelieving generation died off.

There are many lessons here, including the obvious one that the majority is not always right. *Often the majority is dead wrong.* In this case, they were not only wrong, all ten of the unbelieving spies ended up dead and never made it to the Promised Land.

Caleb saw the problems. He saw the same walls and the same giants the ten spies did. *It's not as if he's denying their report.* He knows it's going to be a tough fight, but Caleb had a big God! He understood that one man plus God equals a majority.

It's as if he is saying, "Strap it on, boys. Pick up your swords. Grab your helmets. Let's go take the land!"

But because the people gave in to their fears and were afraid to fight, they wandered in the desert for 40 years. Slowly the whole unbelieving generation died off. The only ones left were Joshua and Caleb.

So now we fast-forward 45 years. After Moses died, Joshua led the new generation across the Jordan River. Jericho falls, then Ai, then they conquer the cities to the south, then the north. Now it is time to divide the land and settle in.

Numbers 14:24,

"My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly."

How would you like that on your resume? God looked at Caleb and said, *"This man is different. He's not like the others. He has a different spirit."* That's the secret of his life.

Why did God bless Caleb?

1: He believed God:

Peer pressure can be good or bad. It's never easy to go against the crowd, especially when your friends are going another direction. If the people you know say it can't be done, it's hard to stand up and say, "You're wrong." At Kadesh Barnea it was Joshua and Caleb against the whole nation. I understand why Israel followed the doubters. I'm sure they were persuasive with all their talk of walled cities and giants that made them feel like grasshoppers. *Fear is contagious.* Who wants to enter a battle thinking there is no way you can win? That's how the Israelites felt. Besides, how could ten men get it so totally wrong? Who are you going to believe—the ten or the two?

It's human nature for people to follow the naysayers. That doesn't make it right, but it helps us understand what happened. If enough people repeat a lie, pretty soon the lie begins to sound like the truth. That's how you get Fake News.

It sounded perfectly reasonable, and from a purely human point of view, the 10 spies were right. *The Jews didn't stand a chance on their own.* But God had said, *"I will go with you."* That changes the odds instantly. If God goes with you, how can you lose? That's the whole point, isn't it?

Give Caleb the credit he deserves. When the whole nation gave in to fear, Caleb and Joshua stood alone against the multitude. They were right, and the majority was dead wrong!

2: He held on to God's Promise:

Caleb was 40 years old when Moses sent out the twelve spies to check out the Promised Land. After the children of Israel made the wrong choice, he heard all their complaints:

"I wish we were back in Egypt."

"I'm sick of this manna and quail."

"Why are we going in circles?"

"Moses is hopeless as a leader; If I were in charge, I'd get this thing organized."

The people wouldn't stop complaining!

Read Numbers. It's all there. The people complained and moaned and griped the whole 40 years. It must have wearied Moses. I'm sure Joshua and Caleb got tired of the constant fault finding.

But now they are in the Promised Land. Moses is dead. The unbelieving generation is dead. General Joshua has led them to a long string of victories. The whole land stretches out in front of them. After 45 years, Caleb steps back onto the stage of biblical history. He's an old man now, way past retirement age, but someone forgot to tell him he was too old.

So he said, "Give me the hill country!"

He had his eyes set on Hebron. When Abraham died, the only land he owned was the sacred burial ground at Machpelah in Hebron. He bought it from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver (Genesis 23). Abraham purchased the land so he could bury his wife Sarah. Over the years it became the final resting place for many of Israel's founders: Abraham / Sarah / Isaac / Rebekah / Jacob / Leah.

Hebron was in the hands of the Canaanites. As far as Caleb was concerned, that land belonged to God's people. He intended to take it back.

Why did he say, "I want that mountain!"? *He said it because he never let go of God's promise, and he never forgot what that land meant.* At an age when most men are slowing down, Caleb was just getting started. He had the foot to the floor, and he wasn't about to ease up. I like the way Jack Graham puts it, "If you're not dead, you're not done. God still has work for you to do."

3: He wholeheartedly followed God:

This fact explains Caleb's success. Six times (in Numbers and Joshua) we are told he wholeheartedly followed the Lord. When James Montgomery Boice preached on Caleb, he pointed out that great men tend to be simple men.

They are men captured by one big idea. Weak men have divided loyalties, so they can never commit with a whole heart to anything. They are here, there, and everywhere all the time. They are never totally committed to anything. But Caleb was a simple man at the core. He believed God, he remembered his promises, and in his old age he was ready to claim what God had promised him. When others were pulled seven different ways, he wholeheartedly followed the Lord.

Caleb didn't consult the daily tracking poll to decide whether he would believe what God said. He didn't stick his finger up to see which way the wind was blowing. For that matter, he didn't ask his friends what they were going to do. Every day when he got up, he determined in his heart to follow the Lord. In that sense, he's the exact opposite of the double-minded man of James 1:6-8. Tossed to and fro by the winds of popularity and public opinion, the double-minded man can never make up his mind about anything.

But Caleb was different. If God said, "*Take the land,*" Caleb said, "*Grab your swords, boys! It's time to go to war.*" He didn't let anything distract him from doing God's will.

So, what really happened back at Kadesh Barnea? Ten spies said, "*Look how big those giants are compared to us.*"

Caleb said, "Look how small they are compared to God."

The cowards said, "They are too big for us to fight."

Caleb said, "They are too big to miss."

We need that same spirit today. If we are going to defeat the giants, someone will have to say, "We have the promise of God. Let's move forward!"

Paul said, *"I am not living my Christian life aimlessly, I am having a purpose. There is a goal. I want to see Christ. I want to be like Him. Christ is my prize."*

"When are football games won or lost?" The answer is obvious. Almost every game is won or lost in the last few minutes of the fourth quarter. You and I aren't young anymore. We can't kid ourselves. We're down to the last few minutes of the fourth quarter. But the thing is, we don't know how much time we have. "We have to play like our whole life is on the line because it is. We don't have time to complain about anything."

Coaches tell players to 'play through the whistle.' That's what we have to do. Our whole life hangs in the balance. We have not yet finished the race or won the prize. As we come down the homestretch of life, we're not sure where the finish line is, except that it's somewhere in front of us.

Our job is to keep running until we cross the finish line. In the ultimate sense, it doesn't matter when that happens, whether today, tomorrow or 25 years from now. The precise moment doesn't matter because we can't know it in advance, but what matters is that we find the strength from the Lord to "play through the whistle and run through the tape." We need the Caleb spirit today, don't we? The older we get, the more we need it.

With that in mind, let us resolve, no matter our age, that we will:

- Never release God's promise,
- Never retire from serving God, and
- Never retreat from the enemy.

Let's keep going for Jesus with all the strength God gives us. I come back to the words of Jack Graham: "If you're not dead, you're not done. God still has work for you to do." Let's laugh a lot, let's encourage each other, and let's keep serving Jesus.

May God fill us with the Caleb spirit today!

Prayer: