

The Strength of Caleb

Joshua 14:6-15

July 26, 2009

Intro

As we come to chapter 14 we find that Israel has not only entered into the Promised Land, but they have also conquered a great portion of the southern territory as well as the northern territory. They have come to the point where they are ready to divide the land according to the tribes of Israel.

They were to divide the territory by lot, as God had instructed them. But this is when the story gets very interesting, because the sons of Judah came to Joshua and Caleb said to him, "You remember the word which the Lord spoke to Moses concerning you and me at Kadesh Barnea. He swore to us that the land on which our foot has trodden shall be our inheritance. Now then, give me the land which was promised."

Caleb is an amazing character in the Bible and there is a lot to learn from his life. At this point he is 85 years old and he says that he has the same strength he had when he was 40 years old! What he wants is to be given the most difficult land there in Israel. It was the most difficult because it was hill country; it was difficult terrain. But its greatest challenge was that the Anakim were there. The sons of Anak were large people and it was they who had put fear into the hearts of Israel at Kadesh Barnea 45 years earlier. Caleb had been waiting 45 years for an opportunity to face the sons of Anak and take the hill country that God had promised him.

Israel was given the land of Canaan as an inheritance. It was the land which God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It's a picture for us of the believer's walk of victorious faith. But it takes courage to take hold of the promises of God and Caleb becomes a tremendous example for us in strength of faith, in wholehearted commitment, and in trusting God's Word.

I. Follow the Lord Wholeheartedly

- 1 In verse eight, Caleb drew a comparison between the spies who went up into the land of Canaan and came back with a discouraging report and himself.
- 2 The other spies made the heart of the people melt with fear, and this is where Caleb said, "But I followed the Lord my God fully."
- 3 The results of faith versus fear become immediately evident.
- 4 Five times in this section Caleb points out that he had followed the Lord wholeheartedly and that becomes key to understanding the strength of Caleb's faith.

A. Faith strengthens the heart

- 5 If you go back to what happened 45 years before this you can see that faith and fear have a direct impact on what happens in the heart.
- 6 Caleb pointed out the problem perfectly when he said in verse eight that because of fear the heart of the people melted.

Numbers 13:25-33 Caleb's message to Israel

- 7 Faith is the key to experiencing the "life to the full" that God promises us, so we need to understand that fear will rob us of it.

Illus- the greatest fear that people have is the fear of the unknown. "What if this or what if that?" People often wonder. What if I lose my job, what if my marriage fails, what if I get sick, what if my car breaks down?

2 Timothy 1:7, For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

- 8 The problem was that they saw the troubles and challenges as much greater than they were. They saw that there were giants in the land; the sons of Anak were there. And then they looked at themselves and saw themselves only as grasshoppers in their own eyes.
- 9 In other words, the giants and the challenges were great and they were small. They were making a direct comparison between the problem and themselves and there is where they made a great mistake.
- 10 What we need to do is to take God's perspective and to trust every promise that he gives to us.

Isaiah 40:21-31 All men are grasshoppers before God

- 11 What we need is to receive God's Word and then believe what God said in all faith.

Hebrews 4:1-2, Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

B. Spiritual is better than physical

- 1 Caleb was 85 years old when he approached Joshua and asked for the challenge of taking the hill country from the Anakim. He then said that he was as strong at 85

as he was at 40.

Illus - what's amazing about that is that many people don't have much strength at 40. But Caleb had a harder life than most 40-year-olds today and it made him stronger.

- 2 Though it is amazing that Caleb had such physical strength, his spiritual strength is greater still.
- 3 I am convinced that there were men who were stronger physically in Israel, but were there any who were stronger spiritually?

Illus – Jack Lalanne is still going strong at 95 years old. At 70, he towed 70 boats with 70 people for one and a half miles; while handcuffed and shackled.

Illus - we live in a society that puts great emphasis on physical appearance, but little value on our spiritual condition.

- 4 It's tempting to focus on Caleb's physical strength, but as I read the story the most important part of Caleb was his spiritual strength.
- 5 In fact, there is a scripture that puts it all in perspective.

1 Timothy 4:8, for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

II. Adversity Makes Us Stronger

- 1 Not only was Caleb not afraid of adversity, he embraced it with the strength of his faith that God would do what he promised.

A. Excuses don't work with God

- 1 There's an interesting story that's related to this in Joshua chapter 17.

Joshua 17:14-18 The excuses of the sons of Joseph

- 2 The sons of Joseph, the half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, wanted more land not just because they were numerous, but because the challenges were too great. But Joshua would have none of it.
- 3 Caleb could have easily asked for something easy. After all, at 85 years old it was time to pull back, to take life easy; but not for Caleb. He would not use his age as a reason for not doing what God asked him to do.

Illus - Moses was 80 years old when God called him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses tried one excuse after another, but God would have none of it.

Illus - God promised to give Abraham a son, but he thought he was too old, and his wife was too old.

- 4 What's interesting is that there were others in the scriptures that thought they were too young.

Illus – Jeremiah was called by God, but he thought he was too young.

Jeremiah 1:6-7, Then I said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak.

- 5 The key is to continue bearing fruit, regardless of the age.

Psalm 92:14-15, They will still yield fruit in old age; They shall be full of sap and very green, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Illus – I wonder what Caleb did for 45 years. I'm convinced he didn't sulk, but spent his time encouraging the next generation to have faith and to be strong. There's much for us to do as well.

1 Timothy 4:12, Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

B. Adversity is like bread

- 6 When the 10 spies who discouraged Israel said that there were giants in the land, Caleb responded with an interesting insight...

Numbers 14:9, "Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them."

- 7 Another way that could be said would be, "Let's eat adversity for breakfast."

- 8 In other words, when we have the strength of faith, adversity makes us stronger. In fact, God uses difficulties and adversities to give us greater faith and greater character.

Illus - when Jesus had finished teaching a crowd of 5,000, he turned to his disciples and said, "You give them something to eat!" And they responded, "We have here only

five loaves and two fish."

- 9 So he presented to them the problem. They were faced with an obstacle far greater than their ability. Jesus was using this challenge to strengthen their faith. And afterward there were 12 baskets of bread, one for each of them.
- 10 Jesus taught them by allowing them to go through a storm that threatened their lives. It wasn't to belittle them, it was to strengthen them.
- 11 In Joshua 14, Caleb understands this very well. He asks for a challenge. He looks forward to the opportunity to take on the Anakim and their great fortified cities.
- 12 It's not ease that we need, we need challenges. There are walls to build, ministries to accomplish. As Jesus said, "The fields are ripe for harvest, but the workers are few."

C. Keep growing stronger in your faith

- 13 Adversity doesn't strengthen everyone. For some people, it only knocks them down.
- 14 The difference comes when adversity is added to faith; that is when we grow; when our trust is not in ourselves, but it is wholly in who God is.

Psalm 27:1, The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?

- 1 Be strong in the maturity of faith vs. caving in, or falling back, or giving into fear, or giving into anger or pride.
- 2 Keep growing; keep pressing on.

Philippians 3:14, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- 1 Caleb wholly followed after the Lord by believing the word that God said to him. And that's a great lesson, for if we do not, it will lead us into error.

Matthew 22:29, But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the scriptures nor the power of God."

- 2 The Scriptures tell us that Caleb had a different spirit within him. Let us also have that same spirit within us.