**CALEB FOLLOWED THE LORD WHOLEHEARTEDLY**

November 17, 2019

Joshua 14:6-15

Key verse 14:8 “but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melted in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.”

The book of Joshua consists of two parts: chapters 1-12, conquest of the promise land, and chapters 13-24, the assignment of land. The tone and speed of the narratives are completely different. The first one, chapters 1-12, is so dynamic and speedy, but the second one, chapters 13-24, is static and slow and very boring. It has a lot of names of places we do not know. We would like to skip them. However, these details are important to mark the exact boundary of each tribe. Interestingly, the strong speech of Caleb is sandwiched between the narratives of allocation of land. In some sense, the life of Caleb seems to be overshadowed by Joshua. By birth, he was a descendant of the Kenaz (Kenizzite) and not of Jewish origin. But his family decided to believe in the God of Israel. His name means “dog” in derogatory term because he was a Gentile. You can imagine how many times he was bullied for being a Gentile. Caleb also means “wholehearted.” In today’s passage, the words “followed the Lord wholeheartedly,” are repeated 5 times. It is a pun on his name. This passage shows how he followed God wholeheartedly to the end, overcoming many barriers of his life such as racism. As a result, he received his inheritance in the promised land. His life was fruitful in the end.

Look at verses 6-8a. “Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear.” Before allotment for Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh approached Joshua and reminded him of the events which happened at Kadesh Barnea 45 years ago, after they came out of Egypt.

In Numbers 13-14, there is the 12 spies’ report on the exploration to the land of Canaan. Numbers 13:2 says, “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.” So Caleb and eleven of his fellow Israelites were sent to spy out Canaan. They observed carefully what they saw: the nature of the cities and villages and their fortifications, the produce of the land and its potential. Since they would be dividing up the land between the twelve tribes, it was important that representatives from all the tribes be in on this initial survey of the land. But they were particularly impressed with the city of Hebron, a walled city in the south, where they saw the descendants of Anak, or the Anakites. When the spies returned, they carried a huge cluster of grapes -- the fruit of the land -- on a pole between them. They talked about the abundance of the land, “it does flow with milk and honey.” But ten of the spies were clearly frightened by the prospect of conquest. They said, “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 was contagious. By nightfall, their negative assessment of the danger 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 weeping 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.

But in the midst of this fear and unbelief two men stood firm in faith and hope -- Caleb and Joshua. When the ten spies were sharing their tale of terror, Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” (Numbers 13:30) The next day also, Caleb and Joshua tried to sway the gathered Israelite crowds with their faith: “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” (Numbers 14:7-9)

Notice the positive attitude. Notice the explicit mention of the Lord in their words. The ten spies didn’t even mention the LORD, only what they have seen that terrified them. Joshua and Caleb have seen the same giants and the same heavily fortified cities, but they were looking through lenses of faith. They saw the LORD enabling them to conquer these people. But that day fear prevailed. The unbelief which had spread throughout the camp resulted in disunity and rebellion -- as fear and unbelief always do. The LORD was angry with the people and vowed that none of their generation would enter the Promised Land, only Caleb and Joshua would enter the promised land. God said, “But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.” (Numbers 14:24) Caleb followed the LORD “wholeheartedly.” What a testimony! So often we follow the Lord mostly, or when it suits us. But when things get tough, and when we must lean on faith rather than sight, we balk. Fear sets in, and we follow our fears instead of our faith.

Look at verses 8-9. “but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melted in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.’” For all these forty-five years, Caleb hid God’s word of promise in his heart, had lived upon it and had cherished it, and followed it wholeheartedly. As I mentioned earlier, Caleb may have been despised as a foreigner and had fatalism in his life. However, Caleb overcame all these and followed God’s promise wholeheartedly. Look at verses 10-11. “Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.” Did Caleb take a miracle drug that made him so vigorous and strong at eighty-five years old? No! Rather than that, he confessed God’s grace and his promise, “just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years.” By contrast, many young men, though their physical age is 20, they act like 85-year-old, and they go around with a weak demeanor, sighing “Huhhhh…” God’s promise and his spirit can make us vigorous and strong whether we are young or old. Isaiah 40:28-31 promises us that “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Notice that in three out of the four statements in this section, Caleb mentions the name of God. “The LORD promised... The LORD promised... the LORD helping me.” Here is a man who has learned to trust in the promises of God and stake his whole future on them. He knows what it is like to have the LORD help him, and he is trusting that the LORD will continue to do so. This is triumphant and powerful faith. It sounds like bragging, but it is faith bragging on the power of God to keep his promises. I like that kind of faith!

Old people usually talk about past victories rather than fighting for new ones. Old people normally stay in their past good memories than dreaming a new dream. Not Caleb. He was full of a pioneering spirit. Look at verses 11-12. “I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.” He was full of spirit of youth so to speak “I am still strong…I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now.” It may sound like boasting or exaggeration, but it was his inner spirit to fight a good fight for God. Furthermore, he claimed boldly to Joshua “Give me this hill country that the Lord promised me,” which is Hebron. (13) He did not claim the wealth or high position or comfortable house to live in, but God’s promised land as his inheritance. Hebron was not a good place to conquer, because already the Anakites lived there and their cities were large and fortified on the hilly mountains. You know well the warrior Goliath was the descendant of Anakites (1 Sam 17:26). “But, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.” Caleb’s root of faith and of his fighting spirit comes from the living God who promised him the inheritance.

Many scholars on missiology pin down the character of resilience as the most crucial element to live as a missionary. Missionaries normally are attacked by evil spirit from all sides and sometimes fall into deep depression and a sense of failure. But if the Lord helps us, we can rise again and fight a good fight to drive out all enemies. Proverbs 24:16 says, “for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again,” because the Lord upholds him with his hand. (Psalm 37:24) Caleb was really a man of resilience by faith, because the Lord upholds him with his mighty hands. Our situations are no different. We are always surrounded by many urgent problems such as job problems, health problems, relationship problems, and the attack from our own personal Anakites to make us fall down. But if the Lord helps us, in all these things we will be more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom 8:37)

Caleb claims the hill country of Hebron as his inheritance. Caleb and the other spies had walked hundreds of miles up to the northernmost part of Canaan and back again. His feet had walked on the whole country. But of all Canaan that could have been his for the asking, Caleb chose Hebron. Why? Hebron had been the home of Abraham for many years. Genesis 13:18 says, “Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.” There he purchased the cave of Machpelah for a burial place (Genesis 23:17). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried there. It was so precious to the spiritual discerning person like Caleb. I think he also wanted Hebron because there were the Anakite giants that had so terrified his fellow spies 45 years ago. “We looked like grasshoppers in their eyes,” they whimpered. “Bring them on,” says Caleb. "They are no match for the LORD!” Forty-five years before he had declared, “Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. We will devour them.” (Numbers 14:9). Now he has a chance to prove his claim. The giants represent the enemies of Conquest, and Caleb is ready for them. Joshua 15:14 says, “From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites -- Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai -- sons of Anak.” Caleb was indeed the giant slayer.

Through Caleb, I was moved by his resilience and pioneering spirit in his whole life. I asked myself “what can I say at his age?” I am today, fifty-five years old, not eighty-five. I am already feeling my age. Preparing the message and meditating on Caleb in this passage, I was deeply challenged by Caleb’s faith in God and his spirit. He followed his God wholeheartedly and was helped by his God. His spirit comes from his God, not from his age. Just as God promised me, if God helps me, I can do great things in any circumstances. May God help me to try new things at my age and reveal God’s glory through my life.

Chapter 14 ends with saying, “Then the land had rest from war,” which means God’s rest arrived upon them (14:15b; 11:23b). The book of Joshua is the shadow of entering God’s heavenly rest and heavenly Canaan land ultimately. When we finish our works in this world, we will enter God’s heavenly rest (Hebrews 4:10) as God promised us. Jesus promised us inheritance, saying “Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age…and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:29-30) At the end of our journey, we will claim our inheritance of the promised land and the Lord will give it to us.

God honors those who follow him wholeheartedly. Disciples must not only see the realities of this world, but fearlessly obey the Lord, even though the obstacles are great (Numbers 14;24; 14:8). May God help us follow our Lord Jesus and his words wholeheartedly to the end. May God help us keep zeal for God’s mission continuously like General Caleb.

Big Idea: Caleb followed the Lord God wholeheartedly to the end and received his inheritance.