

## **Caleb: Wholeheartedly Following God Exemplified**

### **Lessons From Caleb**

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This afternoon, I want to start in Romans chapter 15, verses 4 through 6. In these verses, Paul is reminding us how important it is to go back into the Scriptures and review the lives of men recorded to help us today as we strive to live our lives in a godly manner.

**Romans 15:4-6** For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Jesus Christ, that you may with one mind and with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is telling us here that you can go back into the Old Testament, and there are rich sources of lessons to be learned. And of course for us today, the New Testament as well. These lessons are put in here for us to learn and to grow that we may have a closer relationship with God. They help us to know how God thinks, where His heart is, what His character is. And through the Scriptures, it gives us hope.

And God expects us to learn these lessons. He expects us to read the Scriptures and to apply them directly in our lives. Why? Well, one reason is that these people were just people like you and I. You know, you read their lives, the things that they did, and they are extraordinary. And you say to yourself, how could I ever do that? But if you were in that situation, you would. And our God wants us to go through these stories in the Scriptures that we may experience them and take them in and grow from them. Because again, in the Scriptures, these are men and women just like you and I.

I want to go back and look at a gentleman in the Scriptures. And he is someone, a character in the Bible that really inspires me and has encouraged me, and he is an encouragement to all of us in our Christian growth. Over the

last few weeks, we have heard a lot of sermons, a Bible study about Joshua. And he was a tremendous leader who God chose to lead the people into the Promised Land, especially after the death of Moses.

He had the weight of leading the country, leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land. And in fact, I was thinking there is a famous plaque that most people have in their homes, and it is a verse from Joshua, which says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Oftentimes when we think of Joshua though, we think of Caleb as well. Caleb is the other guy.

There is a little less known about Caleb, and I find though that Caleb is one of the most inspiring personalities in the Old Testament. One of those heroes of the Bible. And today I want to talk about the other guy, Caleb, and the great contribution that he made.

In the book of Numbers, we see that the Israelites had left Egypt and had been traveling a little over a year, and they had come to the edge of the Promised Land. Of course so many times we see here a beginning in the crack of their faith. Right at the beginning, right at the edge of going into the land, all of a sudden they become very cautious. In Numbers chapter 13, I will read verses 2 and 3 this time.

**Numbers 13:2-3** "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I have given to the people of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them." So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel.

Now, the first question is, why would God need to send anyone out to spy this land? He knew what was there. And the answer is, it was not God. It was the people.

Please turn to Deuteronomy chapter 1. I will just touch on this just for a second because there was a reason why they spied out the land first. Now remember, the book of Deuteronomy was a speech, a sermon that Moses

gave just before they entered into the Promised Land. And so Moses is looking backwards. And my heading to my Bible in this section says, Israel's Refusal to Enter the Land.

**Deuteronomy 1:21-22** 'Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.' "And every one of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and the cities into which we shall come.'

You see, it was not God that was concerned about who was in the land or the territory. It was the people. And so often God gives the people what they asked for, and He did here as well. So let us go back to Numbers chapter 13. I will read verse 2 again.

**Numbers 13:2** "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them."

Now, in the next few verses, it gives a list of all the spies, and there are only two names in there that we would recognize. Those are Joshua, the son of Nun, from the tribe of Ephraim. And then there is Caleb, the son of Jephunneh. Now, it is interesting that Caleb was the son of Jephunneh, who was a Kenizzite, a foreigner.

And now the Scriptures do not mention who Caleb's mother was. She might have been an Israelite, we do not know. But we do know that they were in bondage along with the Israelites. In fact, the name Caleb in Hebrew means dog. I have seen commentaries and folks have written that that this means loyalty, you know, like a dog is loyal to you. But at that time, that is not what a dog meant. That is not what the word meant at all. At that time, the word dog was associated with evil or low stature.

Interesting, this man, Caleb, became a man of great loyalty and faith. In fact, in so many words, he changed the definition of this word. Because if you were asked to define Caleb now just by reading Scriptures, you would say, a

man of loyalty. But it is clear, I believe, that he suffered in Egypt and suffered in captivity, like all the others, and maybe even a little bit worse. Again, being called Caleb, and we do not know, by the way, if that was his name or nickname, we do not know. But not just having to go through being a slave, but he also went through probably a little bit of ridicule as he grew up. And so we do not know how hard his life was, it is not told us.

Now, in verse 26, again, it says that he was sent from the tribe of Judah. It is interesting that the tribe of Judah was the largest tribe of all of the 12. They had about 74,000 men over 20 years of age. And so they chose Caleb out of 74,000 men. I think that tells us there was something special about this man. And there was. In fact, the Scriptures describe Caleb as *wholeheartedly following the Lord*.

**Numbers 14:24** "But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully [wholeheartedly], I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it."

Oh, and by the way, it does not just say that one time here. There are six different locations that it refers to Caleb as wholeheartedly following God. Not just once, not twice, three times, but six different times. And what does that mean? It tells you in a nutshell the character of this man. That he lived his life more than just keeping the laws that God had provided. It was more than just duty or obligations or habit. But he was passionate about serving God, and he sought with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength to follow God, which is the greatest commandment there is. So we see what an example this man was.

Again, God told Moses to send the spies out. Now, they went out for 40 days. They went from one end of the territory to the other. And when they returned, Caleb and Joshua had a good report. But the others did not and they convinced all the people that they should not go into the land. Of course, their faith was already questionable. And it did not take much. And the people rose up against them.

I will pick it up in chapter 13, verse 30.

**Numbers 13:30-33** Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it." [He did not say, maybe we can take it. I hope we can take it. There was no question here: *we can take it.*] But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against these people, for they are stronger than we." And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Now again, Caleb and Joshua saw the same thing as the others did. They did not disagree at all about what the land was like. They did not disagree who the inhabitants were. They did not disagree that there were giants or there were fortified cities. The difference is, though, that Caleb and Joshua saw the potential.

They saw that the task before them was not theirs but God's to deliver. You see, they had all just come out of Egypt just about a year before. They saw Pharaoh overcome. They saw the Red Sea He divided. They saw the gods of Egypt destroyed. They saw the impossible being done by God. And then these spies came back and said, "Can't do it." And the reason why is because they were only looking from the perspective of what *they* could accomplish, not what God could accomplish. Again, He said, "Let us go up and take the land and overcome these folks!"

His passionate plea to the people it was not a matter of circumstances of can we do it? It is that God can do it. Do you not see the miracles that we just came out of? He was trying to convince these folks to look forward and not behind, and trust God for what He had already done for them. It is called the Promised Land.

I was thinking about it, it is promised. It was not just Canaan, it was the Promised Land. Meaning, it was already theirs. All they had to do is go in and take it and let God lead them.

Most definitely, these two men were cut from a different cloth. There are elements of these two men that set them apart. In fact, again, in verse 24, it says that "My servant Caleb has a different spirit." I think that it is safe to say this different spirit that Caleb and Joshua had was God's Holy Spirit. And that is why their perspective was totally different from the other spies. Their attitude toward obedience, toward God and all His commands was totally different than all the others because they gave that good report.

And then when you look down into Numbers 14, and I am not going to read it all, but at the beginning of it, again, it says that they refused to enter the land. In verse 4, they began to choose new leaders. And then they went to stone these men: Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.

And I was thinking, you know, here is all the tribes—they are probably men that Joshua and Caleb grew up with, they knew. They were ready to pick up stones and kill them. Where was their faith? But God's Spirit gave them the strength to stand in the front of that crowd, and we do not know how many there were, hundreds, thousands.

But even in that situation, they would not give in to their rebellion. Caleb never gave up. In fact, we read one more plea from Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 14, verse 6.

**Numbers 14:6-9** But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes [They rent their clothes, that means they were distraught over what happened. Moses and Aaron were already praying that God would intervene.]; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' 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."

I find it interesting this one sentence here: "They are our bread." It means we can eat them up. They do not have a chance. It is already done. But

regardless, there was no faith. There was no vision. And as a result, as we are read in chapter 14, verse 9, that God passed judgment on them. And that all those over the age of 20 would not enter the land. They all died on the way because they lacked vision. Only Joshua and Caleb actually entered the Promised Land. Moses died just before going into the land.

And so we see here this example of Caleb, of his loyalty to God, his faithfulness in the face of the enemy, even his own people at that moment were his enemy. He stood for what was right. And now, as they traveled through the land, I think we can also see the patience of Caleb.

Consider this: these were two men that had gone into the land. They had seen and experienced the goodness of that land. They had tasted it. They had handled it. They did not have to imagine how good it might be because they were there.

But even with that, they had to wait 40 years to experience it again. I think that would be torture, knowing that this was promised to me. I was already there, I have seen it, I am walking around, and then you had to wait 40 years to experience it. And we have no idea of the hardships that they had to endure as they continued through the wilderness with their countrymen again, seeing the bodies strewn all along the way.

But never once is there any evidence that Caleb ever complained. He patiently waited for God and His timing and when it was ready for Him to give him the reward that He had promised.

You know, in our lives, we are in this wilderness. We will go through and experience things that are not our fault, but we will experience it. We will suffer hardships and trials. Even though we are working, striving to obey God and honor Him, we will yet still go through these things. We need to have the same zeal and attitude as Caleb did. Because serving God comes first.

It might be because he was a leader. And I was thinking about this, that of all those that went into the land, remember, there was no one was over 20 years of age. And so the people really looked to Joshua and Caleb for their leadership and their strength. Now I think I understand why God gave them a

different spirit. Because they would need it as they wandered through that land.

You know, one of the thoughts that I had is that there is no evidence of him ever being jealous of Joshua being the leader. God chose Joshua in that leadership position, and there is never any evidence of him rebelling but only living his life in a very supportive role. There was no rivalry, there was no envy between them. I think, if anything, the Bible portrays them with a great relationship, a mutual friendship.

Again, Caleb is described as a man who wholly followed the Lord. And I think that this represents that very well. And then it came time, when they were there to apportion the land. Caleb approached Joshua with humility, reminding him of God's specific promise to him. Not out of arrogance or a sense of entitlement. But he was reminding Joshua what he had been promised.

Let us turn to Joshua 14. I find it interesting that he jumped from Numbers 14 to Joshua 14. So maybe it is a way to remember where the accounts of Caleb are in the Scriptures.

**Joshua 14:6** Then the children of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal. And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him: "You know the word which the Lord said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me at Kadesh Barnea.

**Joshua 14:9** "So Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children's forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.'

Again, we do not see Caleb coming to Joshua with arrogance but with confidence, trusting that God is going to stand up for what He said. Believing that God also would help them and drive out the inhabitants of the land. Now, this belief was not based on his own strength but it was a total confidence in God. You know, at this point, Caleb is 85 years old. Turn to read verse 10 and 11.

**Joshua 14:10-11** "And now behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now my strength is for war, both for going out and for coming in."

I do not think he was boasting. I do not know if he had the same strength as an 85-year-old as a 40-year-old man, but I know how it is as you get older: your mind does not change. Your body changes, but your mind does not change. But he acknowledged he knew what God had promised him. But he also knew that it was not because of his strength. It was because he knew that it was his God that would preserve him.

**Joshua 14:12** "Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said."

I find this last sentence interesting. Again, there is no arrogance here. He says here, if the Lord grants it. If the Lord will help me. He is not saying I am going to take it because I deserve it.

And I think this last sentence brings out again the character of Caleb. And at no point, I do not believe in his whole life, but as far as we know, that he took God for granted. We do not see any vanity here in his life. And remember, nothing had changed in the land. The fortified cities were still there. They were still like grasshoppers to the giants that occupied the land. Just as Caleb quieted the people back in chapter 13, verse 30, where he said, Let's go up and possess it, his attitude, his mindset had not changed.

Well, he is bold in his request for the mountains, this mountainous area, and probably this was the most difficult area to take. He was not relying on his own strength or his own abilities, but his belief that God would drive them out for them.

You see, Caleb served the Lord with all his heart.

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The story of Caleb teaches us so many valuable lessons. He shows us that we must have courage in moments of pressure. And when others around us doubt God, we can still trust Him, that He is going to preserve us, and that we will persevere while waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise for us. His life is also an example that age is not a barrier of accomplishing great things because his trust was totally in God. And you can too.

It is also a reminder though, as well, in those words that Caleb gave God the credit that he was still there. That he was acknowledging his dependence on God for every breath that he took. Now, that is how we keep our hearts right with God. It should be part of our daily prayer to thank God for the breath we have that day. As we get older, I think we pray that maybe a little bit more. But we always need to give God the credit for our existence and that we have been called and His faithfulness and grace that He has given us.

These are lessons that we can take in, you see. That is why they are here, as I said at the beginning. He put these verses in here for us to grow from. Therefore, it is a reminder. It does not matter how great the problems that you have in front of you, despite the hardships you may be going through, know that your God is bigger than the giants that you are facing. And that there is no mountain that He cannot overcome for you.

If you will rely on Him; if you will keep your loyalty to Him; if you will be patient and wait for Him, know that we can rely on God's power. We are able to do things that we can hardly imagine, but we can only do them through Him.

Are you wholeheartedly following God? Remember again, God gave us men like Caleb to remind us and show us how faithful God is. A God that honors the faithfulness of His people.