

Joshua 14 6-13 Whatever Became of Caleb?

A couple who had been married for 50 years were sitting out on their porch swing. "*Things have really changed,*" she said. "*Remember how you used to sit very close to me?*"

"*Well, I can remedy that,*" he replied, sliding over next to her.

"*And you used to hold me tight.*"

"*How's that?*" he asked giving her a big hug.

"*And, do you remember when you used to nudge my neck and nibble on my ears?*"

At that, he jumped to his feet and headed into the house

"*Where are you going?*" She asked.

"*I'll be right back,*" he said. "*I'm going to get my teeth!*"

As Betty and I constantly remind each other, growing old is not for quitters. Every day seems to bring a new challenge to be met, a new adaptation to work into our routine. Interestingly, the Bible never speaks of retirement as being a worthy goal or even a reward in life! When the Apostle Paul wrote, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race ...*" he was looking at his execution, not for a pension (2 Tim. 4:7)

- Galileo made some of his greatest scientific discoveries at the age of 73.
- John Glenn returned to space at the age of 75. William Shatner, at age 90 is headed there next week just for a joyride
- Benjamin Franklin was framing the U.S. constitution at the age of 81.
- Michelangelo was still producing masterpieces at the age of 89.
- At age 86, Polycarp chose martyrdom rather than deny his faith.
- In the Bible, Abraham began his walkabout with God at age 75 and became a first-time parent at age 100.
- Moses wasn't called into active duty until he was 80.
- But the record is held by Noah, who at the age of 500 began building a boat!

The lesson is obvious: **when God has a job for you to do, no matter your age, He will give you the strength and ability to accomplish it.** Which is a gifting that your Session is now praying for all us church members these days.

This is just the first of two important lessons we will learn from today's Bible Story; one that you have probably never heard before, which is **whatever became of Caleb?**

Remember him? We first met Caleb as one of the 12 spies Moses sent into the Promised Land. While 10 of the spies returned with a frightful report of fortified cities and giants who made them feel like grasshoppers. Joshua and Caleb reported that the land flowed with milk and honey, showed samples of its abundant fruit, and declared, *let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.* Of course you know the end of that story. Listening to the 10 spies, the people rebelled against God and refused to enter the land resulting in everyone over the age of 20 being

condemned to die in the wilderness; everyone except for Caleb, who God promised would receive his inheritance from that portion of the Promised Land which he had walked over (Joshua 14:9).

But my servant **Caleb**, because he has a different spirit and has followed me **wholeheartedly**, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it

Numbers 14:24

After that, Joshua continued on as Moses' assistant until the age of 59, when he inherited the task of leading Israel to conquer the Promised Land. But we have heard no more of Caleb until now.

Here is an interesting side note, when we meet Caleb today he is 85 years old, saying that he was 40 when Moses sent him to spy out the land. So, many commentators assume that Joshua was close to the same age. But there is Biblical evidence that Joshua was actually only 19 years old when Moses sent his "young assistant" out with the spies (Ex.33:11, Numbers 14:29- 30 cf. <https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/411/jbnq411judges.pdf>) That is why many classic pictures of the returning spies depict a young man in front carrying the pole of grapes, which makes Caleb the older bearded man in the back. Here then is the sequel to today's first lesson: **when God has a job for you to do, no matter how OLD or YOUNG you are, He will give you the strength and ability to accomplish it.**

But returning to the theme of never too old to accomplish great things for God, notice what portion of the Promised Land and what task, 85 year old Caleb was asking of Joshua. He said, *So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day; for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; it may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out, as the Lord said.'* Other translations have Caleb saying, "**give me this mountain.**" At the age of 85 and with God's blessing still as strong and capable as he was at 40, Caleb specifically asks Joshua for a portion of hill country that is inhabited by giants living in fortified towns. So Joshua blesses Caleb and gives him the land which Moses had promised him. Then the end of chapter fourteen, referring to Caleb's land grant, concludes, and *the land had rest from war* which means that Caleb indeed succeeded in clearing all the giants out of his mountains (cf. Joshua 15:13-14).

Another interesting thing to note about this story, is that if no one of that cursed generation over the age of 20, except 40-year-old Caleb, would get to enter the promised land, that would now make him – at 85 – the oldest man in camp by 25 years and he is asking for his inheritance: mountains infested by giants. Which brings us back to today's first lesson: **when God has a job for you to do, no matter how old or young you are, He will give you the strength and ability to accomplish it.**

But as Paul Harvey would say, "now the rest of the story"... along with a second lesson. While he may have been a half descendant of Jacob by way of an Israeli mother, all the days of his life until the very end, he was described as "**Caleb son of Jephunah the Kenizzite,**" which meant that Caleb was considered a foreigner by the Israelis.

Who were these Kenizzites? They were actually descendants of Esau, Jacob's estranged older brother, who lived in the land of Edom during the days of the patriarchs. Caleb also had a younger brother named "**Kenaz.**" (which might just have been a slur of a nickname given to remind him of his foreignness). Interestingly enough, Kenaz's son **Othniel** became one of the first Judges to bring peace to post-Joshua Israel in the years to come (Judges 3:7-11).

So how did these foreigner brothers end up traveling with Israel to the Promised Land? Apparently, for whatever reason during the 400 years that Israel was living outside the Promised Land, some Kenizzites also moved down to Egypt and being of similar heritage they received the same final treatment: enslaved along with the Israelis. Thus, Caleb and Kenaz were part of that "mixed multitude," who also left Egypt with Moses and the fleeing Israelis (Exodus 12:37-38).

Another sad fact about Caleb is that his name in Hebrew literally means "**dog**" which is not a good thing to be called among the Israelis. But, if you break his name apart into its separate syllables it now means "**whole hearted**" which is a phrase used six times in the Old Testament to describe Caleb's dedication to the God of Israel. As Caleb said of himself, "*I whole heartedly followed the Lord my God.*" (14:8). Which may be why he also ended up being chosen as the spy representing the Tribe of Judah. Either he quickly volunteered or was "voluntold;" either way, that the tribe of Judah would let a half-breed whom they considered a foreigner go as their spy in the Promised Land says as much about Judah's lack of faith, as both Caleb's name and personal declaration said about his wholehearted faith.

In Canaan the spies saw the sons of Anak, a race of giants, which in comparison made them feel like grasshoppers. Not Caleb.

- When others saw giant troubles, Caleb saw God's promises.
- When others saw cities walled up to heaven, Caleb saw cities reduced to rubble.
- When others saw dreadful armies, Caleb saw a defeated enemy.
- When others saw only foe's, Caleb saw fruit.

Caleb saw the same land, but while others were complaining that it was too hard for them, Caleb chose a mountain where milk and honey flowed saying "one day you will be mine." He and Joshua were able to see beyond troubling circumstances into the victorious promises of God. Faith is more than saying that you believe; it is acting on what you believe. Caleb the foreigner had a whole hearted faith in God, and for that reason he received the inheritance that other heirs of the promise had lost. Which is our second lesson, the same one that Peter had to learn before he would even go visit a faithful Roman Centurion. **No matter what others may think of you, God honors your faith not your pedigree.** Caleb spent his entire adult life among a

people who treated him as a foreigner, even though he "*wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God.*" But as Peter learned and Paul joyously taught his Greek converts, *there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!* (Col. 3:11). In other words, there are no foreigners with God, only those who by faith become heirs of God's promise ... or not. That's something to think about ... and pray about.