

Sermon outline and notes:

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Num. 14:23-24; 32:11-12; Joshua 14:7-14 “Caleb: Fully Following the Lord”

Intro. Six times it says in the Bible Caleb fully followed the Lord (Num. 14:24; 32:12; Deut. 1:36; Josh. 14:8, 9, 14). That particular description is found of no one else in the Old Testament, except Joshua & King David. That’s saying something! In contrast, 1 Kings 11:6 says, “Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.”

We have already been introduced to Caleb in our study of the book of Numbers. He and Joshua were the only ones out of the 12 spies who were willing to follow the Lord into the Promised Land, even though they knew there were giants there and walled cities. But they did not fear, for they knew and believed that God was greater than any enemy.

Today is Baptist Men’s Day in our church. I think it is fitting that my message today focuses on one of the great men of the Bible. He was a man of faith, & therefore a man of courage. He was a man who pleased God, won a great victory, & inherited a great promise. I think we can learn some important truths from Caleb. I want to challenge our men to be more like Caleb. Don’t settle for mediocrity in your walk with God. Strive for greatness. So based on Caleb’s example, the first truth I want to call your attention to is this:

I. LET US *FULLY* FOLLOW THE LORD

Num. 14:24 says, “But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully....” God was at work in his heart. Unlike the Laodicean Church, he was not lukewarm in his devotion to God. He followed the Lord with unwavering fidelity & determination. In fact, you may recall that Caleb means “dog.” He had a dogged determination to follow the Lord. He clung to the Lord with the kind of determination my dog has to cling to the rope that I try to pull away from her. And he followed His heavenly Master faithfully, even better than most dogs follow their masters.

Now in order to follow the Lord fully, we need to do the following:

A. We Must Follow the Lord in Full Obedience – God called Caleb “My servant” in v.24. That because he did whatever his Master told him to do. He did not say, “I will perform this duty and neglect the other,” or “I will obey this command, but not the other.” He followed the Lord without picking and choosing, being universally obedient to his Master.

If you have an employee who will choose which of your commands & rules he or she will follow, how long would they remain employed? Not very long.

Even so, the Lord is not pleased when we do not obey His commands fully. You may view some of the Lord’s commands as not that important. Perhaps baptism seems needless to you. Perhaps regular church attendance is not all that important to you. But those who follow the Lord seek to obey *all* of the Lord’s commands. We are not to imitate the Pharisee who even tithed the herbs in his garden, and then neglected the weightier matters of the law. Instead, we are to remember that Jesus said, “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Mt. 23:23). Take care, dear friends, that, like Caleb, you follow the Lord fully, that is,

with full obedience. Keep reading God's Word, and obey every command. If you have not carried out some command of the Lord, it's time to render full obedience.

Secondly, to follow the Lord fully:

B. We Must Follow the Lord in Spite of What Others Do – After the spying expedition, Joshua & Caleb were greatly outnumbered in their assessment of Israel's ability to take the land. 10 out of 12 spies said, "We can't do it; let's return to Egypt." It seemed the whole nation agreed, and Joshua & Caleb were in a significant minority. Yet Numbers 13:30 says, "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.'" They were willing to follow the Lord into Canaan, regardless of what others said. Furthermore, the key to our understanding of Caleb's character is found in the phrase, "different spirit." He was different outwardly because he was different inwardly.

If you determine to fully follow the Lord, you will be in a significant minority. At times that will mean you will stand alone. That's because standing for the truth will not be popular with those of the world (John 15:19; John 17:14; 1 John 3:13). You will never fully follow the Lord if you are more concerned about "what everyone else thinks" than "what God thinks". Many in the Lord's church must come to grips with the fact that we are not to be like everyone else. The vast majority of people go the way of sin & unbelief. Only a few follow God like Caleb did. Furthermore, we too must possess a "different" spirit in order to please God by fully following Him. But we cannot imitate Caleb until we get his kind of spirit. It starts with being born again, receiving a new heart. Then as we fully yield to the Lord, we are filled with the Holy Spirit. When that happens, you will have a different Spirit indeed!

Next, to follow the Lord fully:

C. We Must Follow the Lord in Spite of the Obstacles - Some follow the Lord as long as the way is smooth & easy. But when the road is rough & difficult, they quit following the Lord. That is not fully following the Lord! Joshua & Caleb were willing to follow the Lord even though it meant facing giants & walled cities! [Read 13:31-33]. But there are no difficulties to the man who has enough faith to overcome them.

Later, after Israel finally entered the Promised Land, Joshua 14 indicates that Caleb was willing to take possession of the mountain region of Hebron. After 5 years of armed conflict, Israel still had not taken Hebron. The fact that Hebron was built on a mountain gave them a strategic defensive position. It was probably a fortified city. Furthermore, giants lived there (Dt. 9:2)! Yet once again, in spite of the obstacle, Caleb says, "give me this mountain." By the way, he was 85 years old at that time! He was not looking for retirement; he was looking for a challenge! He desired to fight the very men no one else dared to fight. He was not looking for an easy way to take possession of his homeland, but he was willing to take one of the more difficult challenges. If you look over to Joshua 15:14, you see what he had to do to take possession. "Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak from there: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak." Anak & his sons were giants. What's interesting is that according to Num. 13:22, Caleb & the spies were at Hebron over 40 years prior to this, and those same sons of Anak were there at that time. Then in Numbers 13:33 the majority of the spies cited their presence as one of the reasons they should turn back. But Caleb's faith had not wavered after 40+ years. He still believed God would enable him to overcome the giants. He was willing to follow God in spite of the obstacles.

We have a host of people who are ready for sweet duties which bring joy and peace; but as for the fighting of giants—how many say, “Please have me excused.” But a man who fully follows the Lord is not afraid of a challenge. He is willing to take on the difficult assignment. In fact, if you fully follow the Lord, you can resist the devil himself & he will flee from you! (James 4:7b). It is the coward & the selfish man who is always looking for an easy place, or somebody else would do the work. May we follow Caleb’s example. Will you witness to someone who no one else has been able to reach? We you take a job in the church that no one else is willing to take? [Give examples].

Next, to follow the Lord fully:

D. We Must Follow the Lord in Spite of the Personal Cost - Someone may say, “I will follow Christ as long as it doesn’t cost me much.” That is not fully following the Lord! According to Num. 14:10, Caleb’s willingness to fully follow the Lord could have cost him his life. They were ready to stone him to death. But the Lord intervened! Fully following the Lord can cost you.

When Jesus invited some fishermen to follow Him, Mt. 4:22 says that “immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.” They gave up fishing as an occupation to follow Christ. That’s saying something! Likewise, Matthew left his lucrative tax collecting occupation to follow Jesus (Mt. 9:9). One time a certain scribe came and said to Jesus, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” It was as if Jesus then said, “Are you sure about that?” Then He said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Mt. 8:19-20). In other words, Jesus was saying that following Him would involve personal sacrifice, including the comforts of home. Later, Jesus warned that if you are going to follow Him, you must deny self, & take up your cross (Mt. 16:24).

Like Caleb, we as faithful followers of God must be prepared to face adversity & personal sacrifice when we stand for God, and follow Him. There are those who will oppose us with every fiber of their being before they will submit to God’s will. We need to be willing to give up anything that hinders us from fully following the Lord.

Furthermore, to follow the Lord fully:

E. We Must Follow the Lord Daily - Some may be able to say, “I follow the Lord ... on Sunday morning.” That is not *fully* following the Lord! What about the rest of the week? You & I need to follow the Lord fully like Caleb. He consistently followed the Lord. He followed the Lord as a young man, and he followed the Lord as an old man. Jesus set the standard for His followers. He said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

Are you willing to fully follow the Lord? Or are you going to be like most people, and only follow the Lord part-time, & to a small degree? No, let us resolve to follow the Lord fully.

Finally, to follow the Lord fully:

F. We Must Follow the Lord Patiently & Steadfastly - Caleb also teaches us a lesson about what to do when others do not follow the Lord as fully as you do. Because of the unbelief and rebellion of his people, he had to wait over 40 years before he could enjoy the fruits of victory in their new land. He suffered because of the faithlessness of the children of Israel. Yet he patiently waited in the wilderness for his people to arrive at the point when they would be ready to take on the giants of Canaan. He did not go off with Joshua and a few others to work

independently to establish a city in the Promised Land. He just patiently waited on God. Sometimes following God involves patient waiting. What kept him going those many years in the wilderness? Surely it was God's promise that eventually he and his people would take possession of the land. So he persevered, and remained steadfast in following God all of his life.

Caleb reminds me of Adoniram Judson, the missionary who spent 12 years in Burma without a convert. The board that sent him out didn't sense the situation nor what a tremendous missionary they had in Judson; so they wrote him a very diplomatic letter, suggesting that he should come home. They asked him what the prospects in Burma were for the future. His reply was, "The future is as bright as the promises of God." His confidence in God was the reason he could stay in the wilderness of Burma all those years. Although he suffered a great deal and it took a long time for revival to break out, it finally did. His time was well spent. Indeed, whoever builds his life on the promise of God has in the present the guarantee of the better future.

Today I am calling upon you to fully follow the Lord like Joshua and Caleb. And if you do so, how would you react when others in the church do not share the same depth of commitment to the Lord? Will you get frustrated and want to look for another church. Well if you do, don't be surprised if you find the same lack of commitment there as well. No, Caleb teaches us to patiently work with those who are not as committed, and faithfully be an example to them.

So are you willing to fully follow the Lord, even though it means to obey God fully, to walk alone at times, face great obstacles, make personal sacrifices, & wait patiently? Is it worth it? Ask Caleb. Actually, the Scripture speaks on his behalf. Here in our text we see some personal benefits for fully following the Lord. Therefore, to motivate you and me to fully follow the Lord, the next truth we will consider is this:

II. GOD WILL BLESS THOSE WHO FULLY FOLLOW THE LORD

Again, God says in v.24, "because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring [him] into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it." In the story of Caleb, I see three blessings we may enjoy when we fully follow the Lord like he did. First of all:

A. You Will Receive the Fulfillment of God's Promises – That was certainly true of Caleb. Turn over to Joshua 14 and we will see the outcome of the person who fully follows the Lord (see also 15:13-19). There Caleb is talking to Joshua, & recounting the story of his commitment to the Lord. Just as God promised, he did outlive his contemporaries, and entered into the Promised Land. Yet after several years of helping Israel gain control of the land, he still doesn't have a place he can call home. So he says in v.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." After Joshua granted permission & blessed him, we read in v.14, "Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel." This grand old man in his later years had the honor of enjoying what he had once seen. He had only seen the land when he said, "We are able to take it;" but others said, "No, no, no." Well, he lived not only to take it, but to enjoy it for himself.

One day Peter spoke for the disciples saying, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” (Mt. 19:27). In the next verse Jesus promised, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” He not only promised them a kingdom, but leadership in the coming kingdom. Then Jesus applies this principle to others. He says, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Mt. 19:28-29).

Listen, God has made some conditional promises in the Bible that are only for those who fully follow the Lord. For example, the 5th Commandment says, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Young people, are you consistently obeying that command? If so, you will be able to claim that promise from God, just as Caleb claimed God’s promise to him. And that leads to the second blessing:

B. God May Give You a Healthy, Long Life – That was certainly true of Caleb! Notice what he says in vv.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 is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in.” We see here an example of the fact that following God fully *tends* to keep a person young and healthy. Joshua and Caleb outlived their contemporaries by at least 20 years, and at the age of 85 Caleb claimed to be as strong as ever. How many of you men in your 80s could claim that! God preserved his life when the people were ready to stone him, & during the years in the wilderness, & through several years of battle. He demonstrates that if you fully follow God, God will take care of you.

One time Queen Elizabeth sent a certain merchant over to Holland, and he complained to her, “If I do your Majesty’s business, my own business will be ruined.” But the Queen said, “You do my business, and I will see to your business.” It is so with our God. You focus on following God fully, & God will give attention to your health & wellbeing. Jesus said in Mt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Why does fully following the Lord tend to promote health and youthfulness? Many sinful habits are bad for our health, and he who fully follows the Lord turns away from them. Faith in God leads to peace in one’s soul, and less stress, which tends to promote health as well. Having purpose and hope for a better future also keeps us young. On the other hand, if you retire without a meaningful purpose for the last years of your life, you will shorten your life. One thing that kept Caleb and Joshua young is the fact that they had God’s promise of attaining the Promised Land someday.

Finally:

C. Your Descendants Will Benefit from Your Commitment – Again, the last of v.14 says, “his descendants shall inherit it.” Caleb left a blessing to his children. He had many sons, and he fought not only to benefit himself, but his sons as well, and carved out a portion for them all. He gave a double blessing to his daughter (Judges 1:15). His children & grandchildren were blessed because their father & grandfather fully followed the Lord.

Last night James Journigan spoke of the impact that Ralph Burgess had on his life. Ralph was saved after his second child died in a terrible accident. Broken-hearted, he & his wife Jo turned to the Lord. He began to follow the Lord fully, and it wasn't long before he was ordained a deacon. He became a fine Sunday School teacher. He raised his 4 remaining children in church, and built a Christian home. I don't know how much property he left to his children, but he left something every more important. He left them a heritage of faith, and most of his grandchildren continue to be dedicated to the Lord.

That's what God can do for you, especially if you decide that you are going to fully follow the Lord as a young man or young woman.

Conclusion: Are you enjoying all the spiritual blessings that God has for you today? If you want the blessings of God upon you and your children, we must fully follow the Lord. Let us not have halfhearted surrender, nor partial devotion, but give ourselves fully to the Lord.

Sources: Roy Gane, *The NIV Application Commentary: Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 & 2 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); sermon by Mike Riley, "Caleb, A 'Different Spirit'" (<http://preachersfiles.com/caleb-a-different-spirit/>); C. H. Spurgeon, "Caleb—The Man for the Times" (11/1/1863; spurgeon.org). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).