

Caleb- The Man who Always Followed God

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn for a little to the section of God's Word that we read in the book of Numbers, and let us look at chapter 14 and at verse 24.

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

As we know, we know it historically, we know it at a national level, and we know it at a personal level, at an individual level, that there are sometimes events take place that have incredible consequences.

I'm sure, as we look back over our lives, we sometimes say, after a certain thing has happened, that our lives have never been quite the same again, either for good or for bad.

And that, I think, is probably true for everybody. Well, that was certainly true for this generation, for the Israelites at this particular time.

[1 : 1 2] Because what happened here at Kadesh Barnea, at that time when the spies went to spy out the land, and when the report was brought back, we find that the impact upon the Israelites was absolutely devastating.

It was one of the huge turning points in their life. And we find here that the Lord had taken Israel out of Egypt, and he could have taken them to the promised land in a very short time.

But the Lord deliberately took his time taking them. Because while they had come out of Egypt, there was an awful lot of Egypt that had to come out of them. Because even although they were slaves in Egypt, they had begun to follow the ways and the practices of the Egyptians. And it tells us that they had fought, had begun into the ways of idolatry.

And although they still knew of God, they didn't know the Lord properly. And so the Lord knew that it wouldn't be a blessing to take the Israelites in that condition, in that spiritual poverty that they were in, and take them straight away into the land of promise.

And so the Lord is going to stop and take his time with them. Because he has to teach them. And he has to break them. And he has to mold them. And he has to shape them.

[2 : 5 1] And the Lord is the same with you and with me as well. And very often the Lord stops us. Now, by nature we're impatient. And when we're stopped, we don't like it.

And we say to ourselves, what is God doing? Because sometimes nothing seems to be happening. Or in fact, sometimes things seem to be going in reverse. And we find it difficult sometimes to understand what are the purposes of God.

But we've always got to remember, if you are a believer, that God is at work in your life. And as we saw last week, that his great purpose is to change you, is to conform you to the image of a son of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is God's great plan, his great purpose for you. It overrides any purpose and any plan that you have. And we've always got to remember that.

And again, sometimes when we're praying for something and seeking something, and what we believe we're praying is the right thing.

[3 : 55] Things that we pray for ourselves, for our family. And we find that the Lord doesn't seem to be answering, and we wonder what is happening. We've always got to remember that the Lord waits that he might be gracious.

Because if the Lord were to give us sometimes what he intends to give us, but if he was to give it to us right away, it wouldn't be a blessing. We might become proud, or critical, or judgmental, or all the wrong things.

So the Lord often has to prepare us for the blessings that he intends to give us, and the blessings that we often pray for. And that was what the Lord was doing with Israel in the wilderness.

God was at work in them, breaking them and molding them. Now we know the history of Israel that in their wilderness journey, that it was a journey where they were constantly complaining and groaning and murmuring against God over and over and over again.

So the Lord was, as we say, he was working in them, and he was preparing them eventually for this journey into the land of promise. And maybe tonight the Lord is doing the very same thing with you, that he is at work with you.

[5 : 18] Don't give up. Don't become impatient. Don't turn away and say, oh, God has forgotten. He hasn't. God is always at work. He is doing, and he continues to do.

Anyway, we find that Israel, they have moved from Sinai because they spent, the Lord had taken them. Remember, they were at Sinai for close to nine years.

And the purpose of them being there was that the Lord was establishing. Remember, there was the tabernacle was constructed, and the law was given.

And it was essential that before Israel went into the land of promise, that the law of God and the worship of God had to be established because this was key to their future.

And so the Lord has been at work preparing them. We've always got to remember that. God's priorities in our lives are often different to our own. God's priority for your life is that you will worship him, that you will seek to glorify him on earth.

[6 : 33] Man's chief end, remember what the Catechism says, is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And we've always got to remember that. That's what he's looking for from you and from me, that our lives are seeking to glorify God.

And unless we have an awareness of who God is, unless we have an understanding of his word and of the whole gospel truth, then we're not going to be able to do that.

So here at Israel, they're now at the borders. They've reached the edge of the desert and the borders of the promised land. It's an exciting time. And Moses picks 12 men, one from each tribe.

And these 12 spies are being sent out for 40 days to spy out the land. And this would be in a way to encourage the people because Moses knew that it was God's plan and intention to take Israel into the land of promise.

And we read of the great detail that in verse 17 of chapter 13, Moses sent them to spy out. Go, he says, and see what the land is and find about the people where they dwell, what their cities were like, what the land was like.

[7 : 55] Was it rich, poor, what are the trees, and so on. But he says to them, be of good courage, and so on. So the spies came back, and Israel were waiting with bated breath for the report.

And they saw the huge cluster of grapes that they took. It was so big that they had to put it on a pole, and between two it would be on their shoulders. And two men walked with this huge cluster of grapes.

And this was just an evidence of just the rich produce of the land. So straight away the people, you could picture them rubbing their hands, and they were saying, Whoa, it is truly a land that is flowing with milk and honey.

And the spies said that. It is exactly what we've been told. It's a rich, fertile land. But.

They came with us, but. And basically the spies were saying, Yes, it's a wonderful land. It's a rich land. It's a great land. But we haven't a chance.

[9 : 02] You should see the cities. They're so fortified. And as for the people there, they're giants. We felt like, well, obviously they're exaggerating big style, but they say, we felt like grasshoppers beside them.

We haven't the slightest chance. That's what they were saying. And of course the hearts of the Israelites melted. They just thought, this is awful.

And so we find that we come to this, really this awful moment in chapter 14. Then all the congregation raised a loud cry.

And the people wept that night. And we find that all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron. We need to be very careful what we say before God.

Because you'll notice what the Israelites were saying before God. They said, would that we had died in the land of Egypt or that we had died in the wilderness.

[10 : 11] That's what they're saying. We would rather that we died in the wilderness rather than go into that country and all be killed by the sword. And the Lord took them at their word.

And the Lord said, all right, that's exactly what's going to happen. You're all going to die in the wilderness. It was a fearful judgment that came upon them.

But you see, over and over and over and over and over and over again, they refused to believe the word of God. And what the Lord is saying to them is this.

And again, it's interesting. Because they're saying, our wives and our little ones will become a prey. What's going to happen to our children? Well, it's very interesting.

The children that they were afraid would be destroyed were the actual ones that did go in to the land of promise. And all those who fought against God, who rebelled against God, who completely refused to believe the word of God and believed the word of the spies, the Lord said, enough is enough.

[11 : 26] This generation are going to perish in the wilderness. And for 40 years, the number of days that the spies spent in the land, a day for a year, or a year for a day, you are going to wander for 40 years in the wilderness.

And the next generation, the young ones, they are the ones who are going to go in. Of course, there were two of the spies that were exempt from that. That was Joshua and Caleb.

And we find that Joshua and Caleb, they had a different verse 6. And Joshua, the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who spied out the land, said to the congregation, The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land.

If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. Do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us.

So you see Joshua and Caleb, they're there saying to the people, No, you've got it all wrong. Stop, stop. Don't rebel against God. Do you realize what you're doing?

[12 : 41] You're venting your anger against God. You are raging in unbelief against God. You can't do that. You cannot. This is real rebellion.

God's promised. He'll take us in. In fact, they say the people are like bread for us. It's going to be easy. And the Israelites were so incensed at them that they decided they were going to stone them.

And stoning was, this is how ironic it is, stoning was a sentence of death for apostasy. So they were making out the two men who were standing on the side of God, declaring the word of God.

They were ready to stone us apostates. It was them who were apostates. That's what sin is like. Sin distorts the whole situation. It makes good evil and evil good.

It makes the truth a lie and the lie a truth. And so on. It's all twisted. Well, that's exactly how it was. And then we find that the glory of the Lord appeared.

[13 : 53] And God passed judgment upon Israel. But then the Lord singled out these two men. And what we're looking at particularly is this man Caleb in verse 24.

And this is what the Lord said of Caleb. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went.

And his descendants shall possess it. The other ten spies died of a plague. And of course, as the years went on, all that generation that rebelled died.

So Caleb here is this really quite exceptional man. Now, the word Caleb actually comes from the word dog in Hebrew.

So it's maybe not the most complementary of names at one level. But Caleb, of course, today has become a very popular name, boy's name. And today it means devoted or wholehearted.

[14 : 57] And again, when you think of a dog, a dog is a creature that follows. A dog is known very often for its loyalty. And that's the kind of passion that Caleb was.

He was somebody who was absolutely loyal. He was loyal to God. And so that there's this, as we say, this wholehearted devotion.

And Caleb, we're told here, had a different spirit. He had a different spirit because he had God's spirit within him. The spirit of the living and true God was working in him.

Now, every single believer has the spirit of the living and true God working and living and abiding and residing. Forever within. The Holy Spirit is dwelling within you tonight as a believer.

But the thing is that sometimes we aren't following the Lord fully in the way that Caleb was. Caleb is a shining example to us.

[16 : 01] And Caleb really is a challenge to us all. Because Caleb saw things differently. The reason why Caleb was the kind of man that he was is that he had his eyes fixed upon the Lord.

And when he had his eyes fixed upon the Lord, he heard the word of God and he believed the word of God. Caleb had nothing else to go on except God's word.

He didn't know when God was going to take Israel in. He didn't know how God was going to take Israel in. He didn't know, as we say, the whys and the wherfers and all these things.

He just knew he was going to do that. And he believed that word. And that's what God wants you and me to do. To build our life upon his word.

To believe his word. To trust him. And we've always got to remember that. God's word is true. It cannot change. The circumstances of our life can change and do change.

[17 : 03] God's word doesn't. We must always, always, always trust him. God is not a man that he should lie. Nor the son of man that he should repent.

Hath he not said and shall he not do it? Hath he not spoken and shall he not make it good? That's what the word of God says. So we see that's faith. Taking God at his word.

And again, when we meet Caleb, years later, 45 years later in the book of Joshua, after they've conquered the land and they've fought all the battles, we find Caleb coming up to Joshua and reminding Joshua of all that has happened.

And Caleb tells him, tells Joshua, in fact, if you turn to Joshua chapter 14, we find what Caleb is actually saying to Joshua.

Go to verse 8. Well, in fact, we won't go back to verse 6, but he says, I was 40 years old, in verse 7, when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land.

[18 : 25] And I brought him word again as it was in my heart. But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt. Whoa.

That's not good. That's what the other people did. They made the heart of the people melt. They discouraged the people.

They knocked them down. You know, that's one of the most serious things that a person can do. You know, we live in a world that hates Christ and hates the Christian. And you know, one of the things that Caleb, this is one of the great things about him, Caleb was an encourager, just like Barnabas in the New Testament.

Caleb was somebody who took God's word and encouraged the people in it. And he said, God is saying this. Let's do it. And you know, you make sure.

Two things. First, like David, that you encourage yourself in the Lord. You know, when things got tough for David and his world was collapsing and everything was falling round about him, there are times we read these words, David encouraged himself in the Lord.

[19 : 38] In other words, David went alone with the Lord. And he says, Lord, I need to do business with you. Everything is going upside down on me. My life is just, I'm barely escaping with my life.

Everybody is against me. There's nothing but injustice. Lord, help me. And so David would do business with the Lord.

And as he did business with the Lord, he became encouraged by the Lord, ready to go on again. And that's what you and I must do. But we must encourage one another as well.

Because we live in a world where we're always getting knocked down. Let's not be knocked down in the church. You make sure that you don't knock down another believer. But that you seek all of us.

To build them up. To encourage them. To seek to strengthen them. A wee word in season. So easy to knock down. Plenty to knock down in the world. Don't be. Let us make sure that we don't knock one another down.

[20 : 42] Well, that's what the ten spies did. They knocked down the people of God and caused their hearts to melt so that they had no fight in them whatever.

Caleb and Joshua were the very opposite. And so that's what Caleb is doing. He's reminding Joshua of what happened. And he was saying, I have followed in verse 9, surely the land on which your foot is trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever.

Because you have wholly followed the Lord. Followed the Lord fully. And that's the wonderful thing about Caleb. You see, it didn't matter what other people were saying.

You and I know people are fickle. They're always changing their mind. You look at the life of Jesus Christ. And at the very beginning of his ministry, crowds were following him.

They thought he was wonderful. They thought he was so wonderful they wanted to make him king. But that didn't last. Within three years, the crowd who wanted to make him king were crying in Jerusalem, crucify him, crucify him.

[21 : 52] They were baying for his blood. One of the saddest verses in scripture. It says this, in the time of Jesus. From that time, many of his disciples went back and walked no more with Jesus.

To the point that Jesus turned to the twelve and said, will you also go away? Well, Caleb was the type of person who would have answered in the same way as Peter.

To whom else can we go? Because you are the words of eternal life. Caleb was the kind of person. It didn't matter. If it was popular to follow Jesus, he was there.

If it was unpopular to follow Jesus, he was there. He was following Jesus even when they were ready to stone him. But he was still ready to follow Jesus.

That's the kind of commitment that this man Caleb showed. And Caleb followed, as we say, the Lord through thick and thin. And what does it mean then to be following the Lord?

[22 : 58] Well, if we're following the Lord Jesus, it means that we have to be going the same way as him. You can't follow Jesus and go in an opposite direction. If Jesus is going in a particular direction, if you're following him, you have to be going the same way.

That's really one of the things. Tonight, if you're following Jesus, you're going the same way. Jesus said, I am the way. There is no other way.

So either you're following Jesus on the way, on the right way, or you're not. To follow Jesus is seeking to live like Jesus.

To speak like Jesus. We should always be bringing God's word into our situation so that whether we're at work, or at home, or at school, or in church, or in our relationships, or our leisure time, wherever we are, we should be seeking to live as a Christian.

And to live as a Christian is to live as Christ would have us live in this world. To resemble Jesus. There should be the family resemblance.

[24 : 12] Again, we were looking at that last week. That is part where he has become the firstborn. Remember how we're looking at that in Romans chapter 8, Romans 8, verse 28 and 29.

So that every believer should have a family resemblance to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you don't, there's something wrong. It's not just when we come to church in the Lord's day.

But it's all the time. That's what it means to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus means having our eyes fixed upon him. We can't be following Jesus and looking elsewhere at the same time.

To follow Jesus means to be living close by. To be walking closely with him. We've mentioned it often enough before.

It's always, yes, it's good to follow Jesus, but it's dangerous to follow Jesus afar off. Peter tried to do that. And he got into all kinds of problems. It wasn't long before Peter was denying Jesus with oaths and with curses.

[25 : 19] When he was following Jesus afar off. Dangerous place. But that wasn't the case with Caleb. He was somebody who followed the Lord completely.

And the wonderful thing in Joshua, he gives this testimony. Here he is at 85. When he crossed into the promised land as a spy, he was 40.

Here we are 45 years later. And Caleb is saying, I have fully followed the Lord. Year 1, year 2, year 20, year 40, year 45.

He followed the Lord. And do you know something? Our church is full of people who I believe are like Caleb's. And they are such an encouragement to everybody.

And what I mean by that is, and there are lots of you, week in, week out. Day in, day out, you follow the Lord. You might not do anything spectacular.

[26 : 34] You might not do anything spectacular or anything that people are talking about. But day in, day out, week in, week out, month in, month out, year in, year out, following the Lord.

That is the most wonderful witness and testimony. And it is an amazing encouragement. Sometimes we don't spell it out the way we should.

But it's a wonderful encouragement to the leadership within the church. It's a wonderful encouragement to the membership in the church. Where we see people always there, always following.

It's a wonderful thing. It's a great testament. Even the world takes note of that. Week in, week out, they see you passing, making their way to church. It's a wonderful statement.

A wonderful testimony. Well, that's the kind of man that Caleb was always following. And the wonderful thing was that at the age of 85, he said, I am still armed and ready to go out.

[27 : 43] If the Lord wants me, he says, I'm ready. Isn't that wonderful? 85 years of old, and he's still got his armor. And he still says, I'm ready for the fight.

This is a real soldier. And we have to ask ourselves, at that age, where on earth did he get that strength? Well, years later, the prophet Isaiah said, those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. That's where Caleb got his strength.

Because he learned to wait upon the Lord. And it will be the same for you and for me. We can't do it on our own. We haven't the wherewithal for the spiritual battle.

It is only in and through the Lord. So that like the apostle Paul, we're able today to say, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Psalm 27 says, wait on the Lord and be of good courage.

[28 : 50] And he shall strengthen your heart. As we conclude tonight, if you tonight are a believer and you're following the Lord, it's good sometimes to challenge yourselves and say, how am I following?

Am I a Caleb tonight who's following the Lord fully or holly? Or am I at that or like in the Peter mode?

There were times Peter followed the Lord holly as well and fully. But there were times he followed afar off. Maybe tonight you're kind of in the Peter mode. Well, it's good to challenge ourselves and to see where we are.

And if we find that we're following a bit of, we need to go back to the Lord and say, Lord, grant me again. Help me to follow you.

Give me that strength. Help me to wait upon you. Help me to rediscover the passion, the desire, the energy, the zeal that I had before. Help me, Lord, to follow you with all my heart.

[29 : 59] And if it's possible that you haven't started following the Lord, then I would say to you, it's time you did. Tonight is the time you started following the Lord.

Because you see, the Lord is here. He's present. He's present here. We're told that. He tells us that even where two or three are gathered in his name, that he is there in the midst.

And it's a wonderful opportunity, even tonight. You say to the Lord, Lord, help me tonight to follow you. As we said in the prayer, draw near unto God, and he will draw near unto you.

You seek him. And you know something? You will never, ever, ever regret following, beginning to follow the Lord. As we look back over our lives, there are lots of regrets.

There are often things we say, oh, I wish I hadn't done this, or I wish I hadn't done that. Well, I'll tell you, there's not one true Christian who will ever say, I wish I'd never begun to follow the Lord.

[31 : 03] You will never find, ever, a person who has really begun to follow the Lord saying, I made a mistake. You will find people saying that about loads of other things, but never about following Jesus.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we pray that you will help us all to follow you. Help us to follow you with all our heart. We pray to bless us as a congregation, and we pray your special blessing upon the Youth Fellowship tonight, the big YF, as we meet.

And we pray for Professor Bob Ackroyd, and we pray, Lord, that you will grant him your spirit as he leads the fellowship. And we give thanks for all who give of their time to help run these things.

And bless us, we pray. Take us all to our home safely, and help us to follow you with all our heart. Forgiving is our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing in Psalm 71, and this is from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 71.

And we're going to sing verses 15 to 18. It's on page 311.

[32 : 29] And the tune is to Cathero. Thy justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show even all the day, for I thereof the numbers do not know.

And I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord. And thine own righteousness, even thine alone, I will record. And now, Lord, leave me not when I old and gray-headed grow, till to this age thy strength and power to all to come to show.

So, 15 to 18, Psalm 71. Thy justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show even all the day, For I thereof the numbers do not know.

And I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord.

And thine own righteousness, even thine alone, I will record.

[34 : 06] For even from my youth, O God, by thee I have been taught.

And thither too I have declared the wonders thou hast brought.

And now, Lord, leave me not when I old and gray-headed grow, Till to this age thy strength and power to all to come my show.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.

Amen.