

Caleb

Numbers 13:17-33; 14:5-9,20-38; Joshua 14:6-10

Introduction

After the escape from Egypt and Crossing of the Red Sea, the children of Israel were encamped below Mount Sinai, during which time God gave them the Law and the tabernacle. Then they moved across the desert till they came to Kadesh, on the border of the land promised them by God. By God's direction they sent twelve spies to search the land and bring back word whether the people were strong or weak, few or many; whether the land was good or bad; whether the people lived in tents or strongholds. They had to make a thorough search of the whole land.

After forty days the spies returned bearing clusters of grapes, pomegranates and figs. All assembled to hear the reports. Ten of the twelve spies reported that the land was good, **surely it floweth with milk and honey** (Numbers 13:27), but the people were strong, the cities were walled and very great. The people appeared too strong – they were like giants, and **we were in our own sight as grasshoppers** (Numbers 13:33). Therefore the conclusion was that it would be better to return to Egypt than enter the land God had promised.

But Caleb and Joshua were in complete contrast. **Let us go up at once and possess it for we are well able to overcome it** (Numbers 13:30). **It is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land** (Numbers 14:7-9). Joshua and Caleb were certain God would be with them, so there was no need to hold back, and no need to fear.

The children of Israel were infuriated with Joshua and Caleb, and wanted to have them stoned. As a result they suffered God's chastisement, **Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it** (Numbers 14:23). Only Caleb and Joshua would reach and enter the land. All the rest who were 20 years and above would die in the wilderness during the 40 years they would wander there. This was punishment for their unbelief and rebellion. The ten spies who had caused the discouragement died by plague.

In the middle of it all, Caleb was commended because **My servant Caleb had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully** (Numbers 14:23). The same incident is reported in Deuteronomy: **He hath wholly followed the Lord** (Deuteronomy 1:36). The Hebrew word used for "wholly followed" is a pictorial word describing a ship going out in full sail. Every power of mind and body and spirit was fully exposed to the winds of God's grace, providence and Spirit. God could take him in whatever direction he desired and make of him what he wished. He went in wholeheartedly for God and His cause, unhampered by any spirit of limitation. From that arose his assurance, confidence and optimism.

This was the perfect pattern of the man of God in Old and New Testaments. The Lord called him to follow, he committed his life to God and became under God's authority.

He was Christ's in body and soul. **Whosoever will come after me – let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me** (Mark 8:34).

What is it to follow the Lord fully?

Firstly, we need to follow the Lord all our days. This was true of Caleb. We find it recorded 45 years later, when he was an old man of 85, that he had wholly followed the Lord God of Israel (Joshua 14:9). He did not follow in fits and starts, but all his days. Sadly it is not true of all the great men of God – David was a man after God's own heart, yet fell into open and gross sin; at the start of his reign, Solomon was full of such promise, yet his heart turned to other gods. Some men followed Jesus for a time, and were called his disciples. They heard first hand the gracious words from His mouth, but sooner or later they were offended by some of what He taught, and they went back to their old life, walking no more with Jesus.

The people in Ephesus were blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, true followers of God, walking in love (Ephesians 1 & 5). But later we read **To the church at Ephesus, I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love** (Revelation 2:4). And it is still true of many today. Some turn to Christ in a time of affliction, sickness or bereavement, but as soon as they have overcome the difficulties, they go back to the world and their old ways.

Is that true of anyone here? Was there a time when you ran well, were so interested, the Bible was a new book, and Christ appeared so wonderful? But where are you now spiritually? You need to get fully into Christ and then you can follow Christ fully. **If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed** (John 8:31). **Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age** (Psalm 92:13,14). Be like Paul: **I am ready to be offered, and the hour of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, and I have kept the faith** (2 Timothy 4:6,7). He followed the Lord fully, never looked back, halted or slumbered. He was a second Caleb.

Secondly, we need to follow the Lord at all hazards, as did Caleb. The people of Israel wanted to stone him, but he did not care. He would do his duty, whatever evil should befall him. It is easy to follow Christ in the sunshine, but not in the storm. As long as it is fashionable in some circles to follow Christ, many make a profession. But trouble soon discourages them. Jesus pointed out that His followers must bear reproach even of their nearest friends. **He that loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. He that loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me** (Matthew 10:37).

Sometimes it is not persecution but love of ease that discourages men from following the Lord fully. It is probably why John Mark refused to go with Paul and Barnabas into Asia. If Christ was crowned with thorns, we must not expect to be crowned with roses. Paul could testify, **For whom I have suffered the loss of all things** (Philippians 3:8). This loss may even go to the extent of losing life. This is the point of "taking up the cross".

Motives to follow the Lord fully

Him will I bring into the land (Numbers 14:24). The other spies died of the plague, but Caleb and Joshua went into the Promised Land. **In keeping the commandments there is great reward** (Psalm 19:11). To follow Christ fully is the only way to a happy life. There is no one more miserable than the backslider or the Christian with a divided heart. Some have enough religion to make them miserable, but not enough to make them happy. When we turn aside from following Christ fully, we are providing misery for ourselves. True happiness entails giving up our heart and all to Him.

*“They that trust Him wholly
Find Him wholly true.”*

Inconsistency mars communion and therefore joy. Past experience shows that we were happiest when walking closely with God. True self-denial brings hundred-fold reward, even in this life – if not materially, then spiritually in peace of conscience and joy in the Lord.

We are also motivated to follow the Lord fully because this is the way to be useful. The useful Christian is a thriving Christian. The word came to Abraham, **I will bless thee and make thee a blessing** (Genesis 12:2). To follow Christ fully leads to blessing in the home, church, world around us. This in turn means we will die happily. If we would die the death of God’s people we must live their life. Happy the man at the end of a life following the Lord fully who can say, “I am ready to be offered.”

Another motivation is the reward we shall receive. We shall be rewarded according to the work we have done. 1 Corinthians 3 warns that though we shall be saved, loss may be suffered if we have not fully followed the Lord. **If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15). The more fully and unreservedly we follow now, the more abundant our entrance into His everlasting Kingdom will be. A closer walk with Christ now, means closer with Him in eternity.

By what means we may follow the Lord fully

Not only the requirement, but also the means are pointed out. God knows our weaknesses, waywardness, fickle hearts and infirmities. He does not bring us to salvation and then leave us to walk to the great city on our own. Many imagine this is so, especially when despair and discouragement grips their life and outlook.

The first thing we learn from Caleb’s example is that he kept his eyes on the Lord. **He endured as seeing him who is invisible** (Hebrews 11:27). **I have set the Lord always before me** (Psalm 16:8). His eye, his interest, his concern was only in one direction. His own reputation, name, honour and his own ends would have kept him from following fully. We cannot have eyes in two directions at a time.

The indescribable loveliness in Christ attracts our soul to follow Him. He is so suitable, for He answers the needs of the soul. We are guilty and He is righteous. We have weakness and He has strength. We are stained and He is pure. He completely answers the needs of our soul. He will forgive us seventy times seven. **He will in no**

wise cast out (John 6:37). **Run the race.. looking unto Jesus** (Hebrews 12:1,2). **My soul followeth hard after thee** (Psalm 63:8).

The second means we have to help us follow fully is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Caleb had another spirit. The Christian has the Holy Spirit within, and how well equipped He is. He heals, sanctifies, teaches, upholds and renews. What divine resources we possess. Yet how little we use them. The Spirit in the soul is meant to be a constant stream. **Out of his inner man come rivers of living water** (John 7:38). Meant to flood in, fill up every part of the heart, will and being, and overflow.

Conclusion

Caleb lived well over 3000 years ago. Yet his God is our God. Much has happened since. There has been more revelation. Above all, Christ has come. Yet the same God is in and through all. The principles remain the same – of service, blessing and consecration. **My son, give me thine heart** (Proverbs 23:26).

We are not our own. **Ye are bought with a price** (1 Corinthians 7:23). If we would be a Caleb, we must give ourselves away to Him. Understanding, will, affections, body and its members – eyes, tongue, hands, feet – are to be His alone. It is sweet to give up self to God, to be filled with His Spirit, and ruled by His Word. A little vessel full of Him, to bear His name.