

FRUITS OF FIDELITY

"Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel" (Joshua 14:14).

Caleb did not have the fame of his friends Moses and Joshua, but he had as much fidelity as they did. Six times God's Word says that Caleb "wholly followed the Lord." In speaking for himself Caleb said, "Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the Lord my God" (Joshua 14:8). Of Caleb Moses spoke, saying, "Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God" (Joshua 14:9). Most important of all, God spoke of Caleb as follows: "But my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Numbers 14:24). "Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swear to give unto your fathers, Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord" (Deuteronomy 1:35-36).

Such repetition has great significance. It mirrors his very soul and unfolds to view the innermost secret of Caleb's life. When God says that a man has followed Him fully, that man is certainly worthy of our careful and prayerful consideration.

Our first glimpse of Caleb, whose name means "whole-hearted" and to which he was true, is at Kadesh-Barnea when he was forty years of age. The children of Israel had left Egypt intending to enter Canaan. For two years they had been making their way toward the Promised Land. The road which led there passed through the wilderness, but God was with them to guide them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He provided them with food, drink and clothing. He protected them from all enemies. He had declared to them the excellence of the land, promised them that He would guide them to it, and then commanded them to go up and possess it.

In contrast with the land of burdens and bondage from which they had been delivered, and the barrenness of the wilderness through which they had just passed, it was a land of sufficiency, safety and satisfaction. This land was set before them as an outright gift to be had for the taking. It was already theirs so far as God was concerned, but it was to be made theirs in actual possession by simple faith and obedience.

But what did they do? Upon arriving at the borderland of their dreams, instead of going at once and possessing the land as God had commanded them, through unbelief they failed to go all the way and claim their inheritance. So many today are like them in that they make a good start and a fair showing, but fail to go all the way. They refuse to attempt great things for God. An eminent English lawyer had often spoken to one of his wealthy clients about the salvation of his soul. The rich man always answered, "I don't believe in going all the way." It happened that they were traveling by train from London to Brighton. When the train was approaching a certain station, the lawyer said to his friend, "This is your destination," and helped him to get his baggage together. Upon seeing that he had made a mistake, the wealthy man said, "Why did you say that this was my station?" The lawyer replied, "You don't believe in going all the way." "Oh," said he, "that is in religion. I go all the way in my business." Many others are like that, but Caleb was not among their number. "He wholly followed the Lord God of Israel."

Instead of obediently possessing the land, the children of Israel asked Moses to appoint an appraisal committee to spy out the land. A committee of twelve was selected, one man from each tribe and each one a man of distinction, judgment and discretion. They were chosen for physical endurance, quickness of eye, tact in emergencies and good judgment of the land and people.

As a representative of his tribe, Caleb went with the eleven representatives of the other tribes to investigate Canaan and report on both its resources and its facilities for resisting conquest. I like to think of Caleb marching at the head of this group -- head up, eyes like an eagle, girdle tight, step quick and firm, and hair streaming in the wind. He could march all day, sleep on the ground and be the first man up in the morning. Nothing escaped his notice. He realized that truly they had found a land of magic charms, luscious fruits, alluvial soil and marvelous advantages.

After a forty days' exploration of Canaan the twelve spies returned to Kadesh-Barnea. All of them agreed that the land which they had just explored was well worth possessing. Ten of them reported that any effort to get possession of the land would be futile, and their report caused great disappointment and consternation. Caleb and Joshua submitted a minority report and said, "Let us go up at once and possess the land; we are well able to overcome it." Caleb's appeal was an expression of real trust in God. The secret of his strength and courage and faith was that "he wholly followed the Lord."

In the light of our text and its setting it is clear that Caleb's fidelity to God and duty produced certain desirable fruits. Among these fruits were the following:

I. Preservation.

Caleb had reached the age of eighty-five when our text was spoken of him. Forty-five years earlier he had been chosen by Moses as one of the twelve spies to cross the border into Canaan and explore that land. In the intervening years all of the adult members of Israel's tribes had passed away. The wilderness in which they had wandered had claimed their remains, with two exceptions. Joshua and Caleb had survived. Hence we have in verse ten the grateful exclamation by Caleb, "Behold, the Lord hath kept me alive." We need to read into this word "alive" something more than physical survival. Caleb had been kept alive in mind and vision and spirit. Too many of us go on breathing after we have stopped living. Not so with Caleb!

God kept Caleb alive:

1. In a situation of unbelief.

That day when the twelve spies came back to camp to report on their findings in the land of Canaan, they agreed that it was a goodly land, altogether worth possessing. But ten of them, intimidated by their foes, said, "We can never conquer this land. There are too many risks, too many difficulties." Caleb and Joshua, on the other hand, saw the same difficulties and drew a different conclusion. They said, "God is well able to deliver the land into our hands. Let us go up at once and possess it."

This fearfulness and disloyalty on the part of the ten spies and, later, on the part of the people are referred to in Hebrews 3:19, where the Spirit of God had it recorded that "they could not enter in because of unbelief." So, with the Promised Land stretching out before them, the twelve tribes turned back into the wilderness to wander miserably and to perish ignobly.

The everlasting glory of this man Caleb is that, when others doubted God, he kept on believing God. When others printed on their own minds a picture of themselves as "grasshoppers" and of their enemies as "giants," he printed on his mind a picture of the enemies as grasshoppers and of God as the all-sufficient Conqueror.

Unbelief and its twin, fear, have a way of giving you a grasshopper complex: you live a nervous, jumpy sort of life, waiting to be stepped on by the next temptation that comes your way. Far different is the effect of positive confidence in an available God and His almighty resources.

2. In a situation of unpopularity.

Caleb's loyalty to God lifted him above all slavery to the crowd. In verse seven Caleb reminded Joshua that when the spies were called upon to report to Moses on what they found and what they advised he "brought him word again as it was in mine heart." Here was a case of speaking out of convictions, regardless of how well received or ill received they might be. Here was devotion to duty untainted by the yellowish yearning for human applause. It was costly too. In Numbers 14:10 we are told that the tribes massed themselves in disapproval of the minority report and undertook to stone Caleb and Joshua. They would not conform to the mass mood and the mass emotion, so they must be eliminated. In total commitment to his Lord Caleb triumphed over unpopularity.

II. Power.

Caleb said, "As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in." To be sure, Caleb speaks of it as his strength. Yet, as he would quickly acknowledge, it was not his. His was precisely the same experience as Joshua's, to whom the Lord had spoken: "I will be with thee; I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Be strong, and of a good courage" (Joshua 1:5-6).

"I will be with thee." There is the key to the powerful life. It is power passing from the personal Source of power to the personal suppliant for power.

Do you remember, in Lloyd Douglas' "The Robe," that bit of conversation between Justus the Christian and Marcellus, the Roman officer who had been in charge of Christ's crucifixion? Speaking of the risen Christ, Justus tells Marcellus: "I feel aware of Him as if He were close by." Then, smiling faintly, his eyes wet with tears, he went on: "It keeps you honest. You have no temptation to cheat anyone." To which Marcellus replies: "I'm afraid I should feel very uncomfortable being perpetually watched by some invisible presence." Justus replies splendidly: "Not if that presence helped you to defend yourself against yourself, Marcellus. It is a great satisfaction to have someone standing by -- to keep you at your best."

Such was Caleb's strength, as he took it from God, that in subduing the territory around Hebron he "drove thence the three sons of Anak" (Joshua 15:14). These were powerful fellows, and were not easily dislodged.

If you ask what one makes of that, I reply that in the New Testament also there are three sons of Anak, only they wear different names. In I John 2 we are put on guard with respect to those foes that oppose the reign of God's love in our lives. If "the love of the Father" is to master us, says John, then out must go "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:16).

Life's perversions: "The lust of the flesh!" Our God-given instincts twisted and misdirected!

Life's pleasures: "The lust of the eyes!" Ambitions and fascinations unsundered and undedicated!

Life's pride: "The pride of life!" Self-reliance and self-importance, unbroken and unhumiliated!

If you will make up your mind that, like Caleb, you are going "wholly" to follow the Lord, He will enable you to conquer, and to keep on conquering, these sons of Anak that infest your life.

III. Prosperity.

As a result of Caleb's fidelity "Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance" (Joshua 14:13).

To be prosperous, in the best sense, means to have something admirable. When we read that "Joshua blessed" Caleb, we are to understand that he admired and praised him. At eighty-five Caleb was asking for a hard task. He wanted a mountain to scale and possess. Joshua broke into a glowing smile and praised his friend with unconcealed admiration. Men do not admire a quitter. They reserve their scorn for him, or their pity at the mildest. But loyalty to the finish evokes their praise.

Furthermore, to be prosperous means to have something valuable. "Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb," says our text. As cities went in those days, Hebron was large and had the mark of royalty upon it. But Hebron, from the Christian point of view, stands for stewardship, which simply means looking at everything material through the eyes of God and therefore seeing it as a trust from Him. Property for property's sake is crass and corrupting paganism. Money for money's sake is cancerous materialism. But money for the Master's sake is worth getting excited about.

Still again, authentic prosperity consists in having something sharable. Listen to Caleb's daughter as she says to him: "Give me a blessing; for thou has given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs" (Joshua 15:19). The more that God's loyal legion are given, the more they give. They become wealthy not by cornering but by communicating, not by hoarding but by sharing.

Caleb, you have done us good. You have shamed us by your example of faithfulness. Our own unfaithfulness rises up to smite us and make us blush. But your example has done something more: it has lighted a big, bright lamp of encouragement in our souls. We too can leave our falterings and half-loyalties behind. We too can give God the full measure of our dedication and devotion. The Christian must have the Holy Spirit possessing him, purifying him and controlling him if he is to give God the "last full measure of devotion."