

Unstuck

5. It's Never Too Late!

February 3-4, 2018

Here's our focus today: Caleb is 85 years old, and God isn't done working with him yet! Caleb is 85, but he isn't *retiring*. He's *refocusing* on what God has for him next!

There is no retirement in the Kingdom of God! The word *retire* is from the French, and it means *to draw back*. But Caleb isn't drawing back. He's moving ahead! **Joshua 14:10,12** tells us, *Here I am today, eighty-five years old... So now give me this mountain...*

Here's the question: Why didn't Caleb get stuck as he aged? First, Caleb realized the Job Wasn't Done!

There were things my parents taught me, and I suspect your parents taught you, too. Things like *I should always wear clean underwear. I should always finish my plate. And that I wasn't done until the job was done!* If I was told to clean my room, I wasn't done until the room was clean!

I think Caleb was listening when God spoke to Joshua, reminding him that the job wasn't done! **Joshua 13:1** *The Lord said to (Joshua), "You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land still remains to be possessed."*

I wonder how Joshua responded to the first part of that message. *Hey Joshua, you're old!* Thanks a lot God, did you think I hadn't noticed!? And then God kind of rubs it in. *You are old and advanced in years!* Isn't that saying the same thing?

I think there is a difference between being *old* and being *advanced in years*. Men get old. Women just advance in years. And guys, if you don't believe me, just tell your wife she looks old. Let me know how that goes for you. If you can still speak.

The second part of the message, however, is what's important: *very much of the land still remains to be possessed!* God wasn't saying, "You're old, so just take it easy." No! The job isn't done. And if the job isn't done, you're not done. The mission of reclaiming the Promised Land for the people of God isn't finished yet. In fact, it's just getting started, so old man you better get busy!

Caleb heard that. He was a member of the tribe of Judah, and Judah was called to reclaim the central territory of Canaan that included the heavily fortified city of Hebron. Caleb asked to be the one responsible to capture Hebron and Joshua told him to go for it! **Joshua 14:13** *Then Joshua gave Hebron to Caleb.* It's kind of humorous that it says that *Joshua gave Hebron to Caleb*. Joshua wasn't in control of Hebron. It was under the control of the Canaanites and Caleb would have to defeat them to get it. It's like me saying to you, "I'm giving you a million dollars. All you have to do is get a job and earn it."

We need to understand the significance of the city of Hebron. It was the location of the Tombs of the Patriarchs. Abraham had lived in Hebron. It's where his wife Sarah died; **Genesis 23:2** *And Sarah died at Hebron in the land of Canaan.* Abraham bought a hillside there that included a cave. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah were buried there. This was holy ground! But this holy ground was now occupied by the pagan Canaanite tribe of the Anakim. (Note to Star Wars fans: the Anakim were evil, but not related to the evil Anakin Skywalker!). Caleb wanted to claim that city back from the Anakim, who were probably offering sacrifices to their pagan gods right over the tomb of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

By the way, Caleb didn't know it then, but Hebron would become even more important in the future. Hebron would be the city where David was anointed King and it was David's capital for the first 7 years of his reign, until he captured Jerusalem 20 miles to the north (**2 Samuel 5:5**). Hebron is holy ground. God had given that land to the Israelites, but now it was occupied by the pagan Canaanites.

There is a spiritual corollary for us here. To whom does this world belong? It belongs to God, by right of creation **Psalms 24:1** *The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.* Yet on the night before His crucifixion Jesus refers to *Satan as the ruler of this world* **John 14:30** *The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me.* Here, Jesus probably referred to Satan using Judas, who was coming to betray Him. But notice the second part of His statement... *He has no power over me!* As a Christian I recognize that in many ways, Satan has taken control of our world. But I also know that because Christ lives in me, *He has no power over me!*

Like Caleb, we are called to take back what is holy ground! Do you remember the powerful way that is expressed in Handel's Messiah? *The Kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!* That, of course, is Handel directly quoting **Revelation 11:15**.

Caleb said, "Give me this mountain." Now let me ask you, "What's your mountain? What domain of this world do you need to reclaim for the Kingdom of God? The domain of family, education, politics, business, entertainment?" In many ways, each of these is enemy occupied territory. We are called to reclaim those domains for the Kingdom of God. Our weapons in this warfare are spiritual, primarily the power of love and truth. The job description given to us by Jesus in **Matthew 28:19** is, **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.** The job isn't completed yet.

One of the benefits of giving your life to Christ is that you are given a great lifelong mission! I've followed Christ since I was 17 years old. It's been a rich and full and exciting life. I've never had to waste time or energy wondering about my purpose in life! The mission is clear, and the mission isn't completed yet. So you and I need to refocus, not retire! No matter what our age! Caleb prepared for the challenges of old age when he was also young.

As a pastor, I've often been asked, "How do I know God's will for me? What does God want me to do with my life?" I respond that the best way to prepare for God's future for you is to just focus on being obedient today. Spiritual growth doesn't happen quickly. It's step by step and day by day.

Caleb didn't become a man of great faith and faithfulness at age 85. He had been growing in faith his entire life. He was already a man of faith and faithfulness at age 40. 45 years earlier, he was sent to spy out the land of Canaan: **Numbers 13:30** *Then Caleb said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."*

The oldest man I ever led to Christ was named Emmitt Gardner. He was 93 years old when I prayed with him in his hospital room to accept Christ. He was in the hospital because he had been injured when he fell out of tree...don't ask! After he got out of the hospital he would attend a small group I was in. Every week at prayer time, he would weep. First with tears of gratitude that God had kept him alive long enough to accept Christ; and second, with tears of regret that he hadn't accepted Christ earlier. He knew he didn't have much time left to grow in Christ and to serve the Lord. Once he said, "If I'd have just come to Christ 30 years ago!" 30 years earlier he'd have been 63 years of age, which to him seemed like a kid! Don't wait until you're old to accept Christ and commit yourself to His mission! **Ecclesiastes 12:1** *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth--before the difficult days come.* John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was asked what distinguished Methodists. He said, "My people die well!" Christians die well because they live well! Do you know that you spend your entire life preparing to be old, preparing to finish strong and die well?

One man I knew who died well was Albert Steiner. After Albert retired as a pastor, he served as minister of visitation at my Concord Church for 25 years. I always felt guilty sending this 90 year old man out on snowy winter days to visit shut-ins that were 15 years younger than him! He finally retired from that position at age 94. Thirteen days later he went to bed...and died. It was as if he hung up his spiritual spurs and went home to be with the Lord. He finished strong and died well. How do you prepare to finish strong and die well? Obey the Lord's will for you today, no matter what your age!

It hit me this week that Caleb was 85 when God gave him what was probably the greatest challenge of his life! I'm 70. That means I only have 15 years to get ready for whatever it is that the Lord will challenge me to do when I'm 85! So, I'd better get serious about developing my faith! And so should you! I can pretty much guarantee you that the biggest challenges of your life are yet to come!

Caleb didn't get stuck by feeling old and useless. **Joshua 14:11** *I am still as strong today as I was on the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then.* He's claiming to be as strong at 85 as he was at 40! Are you kidding me Caleb? I'm 70 years old and already my mind is making commitments my body can't keep! Caleb reminds me of the old guy who said he was working out in his yard when a pretty

girl walked by, and his pacemaker opened the garage door! Caleb's spiritual pacemaker had kicked in when he accepted the challenge God had given him to take the mountain city of Hebron. The fact is that God will give you the strength and resources you need to do His will as soon as you obey what He's calling you to do! If Caleb would have said he was too old to take that challenge, he would have just felt old!

David displayed the same spiritual vitality in **Psalm 18:29**. David was no longer a young man, but he said, "*With my God I can leap over a wall!*" I can probably get over a wall if you give me a ladder! But David felt he could leap over one! When God gives you a calling, and you obey it, you'll get a shot of spiritual adrenaline that will take you over the wall! You'll begin to say crazy things like **Philippians 4:13** *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!*

If you think you are old enough to spiritually retire, you are just going to feel old. But if you obey God's calling on you today, God will give you new strength! You'll be saying, as Caleb did in **Joshua 14:12**, "*...the Lord helping me, I will take that mountain.*"

Do you know what God is looking for in the Church today? God is looking for 60, 70, 80, and even 90 year old Christians who look back at younger believers and say, "I'm going to take that mountain! Come with me... and please, try to keep up!"