

## **How to Finish Strong**

### **Numbers 13, 14**

### **Joshua 14**

#### **DT- Wholly follow the Lord.**

I appreciate Mitch filling in for me last Sunday. I enjoyed the Psalm Sunday. I hope you guys enjoyed it too. For the next 2 Sundays there is no sermon series, just 2 standalone sermons. What do you preach when you have just 2 Sunday's left? The short answer is you preach the Word. The longer answer is to preach 2 sermons that would encourage, inspire, convict, and uplift. I hope that's what I can leave you with as I lay the mantle of leadership down here. I'll be preaching one sermon from the OT and one from the NT. This week is from the OT. We are going to look at one of my favorite OT characters, Caleb.

I'm sure you've all heard the phrase guilt by association. In Caleb's case it was punishment by association. His life story is a demonstration of incredible faithfulness. Compared to the people around him, Caleb had an uncommon faith. We'll spend a little time in the book of Numbers and then finish in the book of Joshua. Let's pray.

#### **PRAY**

How do you finish strong? If you were to type that question into a google search the results would vary widely. Some results would tell you how to finish a marathon well. Others will tell you how to end the year on a good note. You would find articles from sports psychologists, and life coaches. You would find 7 ways to do this, and 6 tips to do that, and 5 steps to accomplish all your goals. In each of those articles, and websites, and videos you would probably find some good information. It might help you finish a marathon strong, or accomplish all your goals for that year, but how do you finish strong spiritually? How do you run the race of life with perseverance, throwing off all the things that might hinder you including sin? How do you finish strong in that vein, and in that manner? How do you finish strong with no regrets?

I believe the life of Caleb can show us how to finish strong in that way. Perhaps Caleb had some regrets, but if he did we don't see them in scripture. Besides Jesus himself I'm not sure there is another biblical figure that demonstrates how to finish strong than this man. Caleb's story begins in the wilderness of Paran. God tells Moses to choose 12 men, one from each tribe to explore the land of Canaan, the land God was giving to the Israelites.

Moses gives them specific instructions about where to go and what to look for. Are the people strong or weak, few or many. What is the land like? Is it fertile? Do they have towns with fortified walls? He also told them to bring back some samples of the crops. These 12 spies head north and explore the land. They brought back the samples that Moses asked for. Clusters of grapes so big it took 2 men to carry it on a pole between them.

Finally the men made it back to camp and here's what they reported in Numbers 13:27-29, "We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces. But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley."

All but Joshua and Caleb were afraid to enter the land because the towns were fortified and the people were big and powerful. That didn't deter Caleb at all. He tried to persuade the spies and the crowd by saying in Numbers 13:30, "Let's go at once to take the land," he said. "We can certainly conquer it!"

Caleb was ready and willing to go. Let's go right now, at once and take this land. We got this guys. We can absolutely conquer this land with God on our side. He just got us out of Egypt miraculously. He just parted the Red Sea miraculously, then closed it on our enemies. God has provided us with the tabernacle to worship him, he has provided all our needs. Guys, let's go get this land that he has promised us. Caleb had the first thing you need to finish strong, an unshakable vision.

### **1. An unshakable vision.**

Who cares about the size of the towns or the size of the people, we got the Lord on our side. He has told us this will be ours so let's go take it. The courage of Caleb and the faith he had in God's promise is incredible. He wasn't intimidated by anything. His vision was set, not by himself, but by God, and nothing, not a giant, not a city, not an entire community disagreeing with him would shake his vision.

Do you have that kind of vision? We're all in different seasons of life, and truthfully we don't know where the finish line is. Because we don't know, because we aren't promised tomorrow we need a clear unshakable vision of how we want to live life right now; just in case the finish line comes quicker than we thought. I have a vision for who I want my boys to be. I have a vision for how I want my marriage to operate. I have a vision for how I hope God will use me in ministry. I try every day to work towards accomplishing that vision.

Some days I do it really well and some days I fail. If you fail, don't wallow in self-pity, just pick yourself up and try again the next day. Caleb's vision, which was God's vision, was unshakable, but the other men disagreed, and they spread rumors throughout the camp to scare everyone. Listen to what they said in Numbers 13:32-33, "The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that's what they thought, too!"

They were really focused on those giants, those big, tall, strong looking people. As you move into chapter 14 you learn that the whole community is now upset. They feel like they've left the bondage of Egypt to now die in the desert. Their focus, their vision was locked on the wrong thing. All they could see were the problems. We have to learn to see the promise not the problem.

**- See the promise not the problem.**

Caleb wasn't focused on the people and the places of the land, that was a problem, but his focus was on the promise. When you face difficulties like what we see these Israelites facing, do you tend to see the promise not the problem, or does your time and energy go straight to the problem? We need to lean into the promises of God a little more and spend a little less time worrying about the problem. I know that is easier to say than it is to do. Sometimes when faced with a problem you need to take a different approach. In the game of golf different players take different approaches depending on their skill level. If there's a major water hazard somewhere along the fairway guys will layup, hit the ball a little shorter to avoid the water. Others who think they can drive over the water will take their chances and try that.

When I worked at JBU my boss and I would go play golf every Monday after work. There was a great twilight price where any time after 5pm you could pay \$20 and play as many holes as possible until twilight, until it got dark. The second hole at that course was very odd. The tee box was up on a mound and between you and the hole was basically a small forest of trees.

You could layup and go around on the right side of the trees to avoid getting in the middle of that. That's what my boss and I did every time we played except the very last time we got to play together before I moved back to Oklahoma City. I changed my approach. Yes the trees were a problem but the promise or the potential was there to clear the trees and either be on the green or just below it. My boss and I were both left handed and he had just got a brand new driver so I had to try. I saw the promise and not the problem, and with an insane amount of luck I somehow cleared the trees.

Sometimes changing your approach to a problem can really help. It did for Caleb. He saw the promise land based on the promise of God and was ready to go take it right then with an unshakable vision. The others didn't have that vision and they certainly didn't change their approach. Instead, they began to protest against Moses, Aaron, and even God himself. They couldn't understand why God would bring them here to be destroyed. The people saw no way to take the land without catastrophic destruction, so they began to come up with a plot to choose a new leader so they could go back to Egypt.

What's the old saying, "The devil you know is better than the devil you don't." Except the devil they didn't know is a wonderful, beautiful land flowing with milk and honey and grapes the size of your fist. Joshua and Caleb tried to reason with the people one more time. In Numbers 14:7-9 they say, "The land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land! And if the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey. Do not rebel against the Lord, and don't be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the Lord is with us! Don't be afraid of them!"

That didn't go over very well with the community. They started to talk about stoning Caleb and Joshua. Right about that time the Lord showed up. The text says he appeared to all of the Israelites. Family meeting time and this is not going to go well. God was ready to destroy them all with a plague and just start over. Moses saves them from immediate death, but God makes a promise that not one of them over the age of 20 will enter the promise land.

God says in Numbers 14:22, "They have all seen my glorious presence and the miraculous signs I performed both in Egypt and in the wilderness, but again and again they have tested me by refusing to listen to my voice."

They will never see and live in the land that he promised their ancestors. But there is this one guy. One outlier, who is the son of Jephunneh. His name is Caleb, and not only does he have an unshakable vision but he also has an unwavering attitude.

## **2. An unwavering attitude.**

That's the second key to finishing strong. God recognized and called out the attitude of Caleb. God says in Numbers 14:24, "But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land."

Wouldn't you like to be remembered like Caleb is remembered. Everyone else's attitude is poor and faithless, but he along with Joshua stand alone as the only exceptions to God's punishment. Sometimes leaders must do what is unpopular, instead of what the majority wants. The leadership of God's people then and now is not governed by democratic opinion but by spiritually strong, godly leaders who seek the Lord and act according to his will.

To finish strong, you need an unwavering attitude. You might even describe Caleb as someone with an unwavering faith. Jesus mentioned that idea of an unwavering faith during his ministry. In Matthew 21 just after Jesus caused the fig tree to wither he says this in Matthew 21:21 (WNT), "I solemnly tell you," said Jesus, "that if you have an unwavering faith, you shall not only perform such a miracle as this of the fig-tree, but that even if you say to this mountain, 'Be thou lifted up and hurled into the sea,' it shall be done."

That kind of faith, that kind of attitude allows you to finish strong. How do you keep that kind of attitude though? It's sometimes hard for us to keep a good attitude about things when we have to wait a few days for something. Our fairly new dryer quit on us last week and I ordered a new control panel for it, but the first place had it on backorder until at least May. Thankfully I found another place that had it in stock but I'll confess that my attitude about that was not great. Here I am with a poor attitude waiting a week, having to dry my clothes at the laundry mat; meanwhile Caleb somehow keeps the same attitude for the next 40 years as they wandered the desert waiting for that rebellious generation to pass away.

He didn't receive the same punishment as everyone else but he did have to face the same consequences. I'll ask the question again, how do you keep that kind of unwavering attitude for so long, when we sometimes can't keep a good attitude if one of our luxuries is broken? We find the answer to that question 40 years down the road in Joshua 14. The Israelites are finally entering the promise land. For 40 years all Caleb did was walk in circles and go to funerals; that's it.

Now the time has come for him to receive the land that was promised him, and we find out just how he kept that unwavering attitude. Joshua 14:7-9 describes it for us where Caleb says, "I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land of Canaan. I returned and gave an honest report, but my brothers who went with me frightened the people from entering the Promised Land. For my part, I wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God. So that day Moses solemnly promised me, 'The land of Canaan on which you were just walking will be your grant of land and that of your descendants forever, because you wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God.'"

How do you finish strong? You have an unwavering attitude. How do you keep that kind of attitude? You must wholeheartedly follow the Lord.

## **- Wholeheartedly follow the Lord.**

We need to remember that this was not some physical strength that Caleb possessed. This was spiritual strength. To follow the Lord wholeheartedly means that you will follow him completely. You will follow him and love him with heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's the greatest commandment Jesus said. Caleb went to a lot of funerals, but at his funeral the people would be able to say that he followed God wholeheartedly. Would they be able to say that about you? Maybe there have been times in your life when you did waver, times when you were shaken. Times when you found the things of this world more important, more attractive; but now you're here. Now you've changed. Now you want to change.

Now you know without a doubt that God is your refuge and strength. Like Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12 you can say, "But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return."

A life lived for God is so powerful. Our lives can be so influential when others see our consistency. Instead of constantly bashing others on social media we lift others up in person through encouragement and prayer. Instead of doubting what God can do we have faith that he will keep his promises. We focus on those promises more than the problems. We let love win over evil and hate. Joy oozes from our lives.

Caleb had to wait patiently for the Lord. Sometimes we must wait as well. The Christian band Shane and Shane have a song titled "I Will Wait For You" based on Psalm 130. The beginning of that song goes like this:

Out of the depths I cry to You

In darkest places I will call

Incline Your ear to me anew

And hear my cry for mercy Lord

Were You to count my sinful ways

How could I come before Your throne

Yet full forgiveness meets my gaze

I stand redeemed by grace alone

Yeah, I will wait for You, I will wait for You

On Your word I will rely

And I will wait for You, surely wait for You

'Til my soul is satisfied

The words of that song are very similar to the words from the Psalm itself. Psalm 130:5-6 (NIV) says, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."

Waiting patiently for the Lord can be a hard thing but the reward is worth it. Your soul will be satisfied. Caleb waits and now satisfaction is finally coming. The land is finally his, but there's still one more thing to do. There's still one more demonstration of how to finish strong from the life of Caleb. Caleb was mustering up the spiritual strength and the physical strength to take one more mountain. The last thing you need to finish strong is an unfailing confidence.

### **3. An unfailing confidence.**

They were in the promise land but so were the people who had been inhabiting it 40 years ago when Caleb saw it the first time. What Caleb asks for from Joshua is nothing short of full and complete faithfulness in the promise of God. Caleb truly had an unfailing confidence, not in himself but in what God could do through him. Listen to what he asks for in Joshua 14:10-12, "Now, as you can see, the Lord has kept me alive and well as he promised for all these forty-five years since Moses made this promise—even while Israel wandered in the wilderness. Today I am eighty-five years old. I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then. So give me the hill country that the Lord promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns. But if the Lord is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the Lord said."

If that doesn't give you goosebumps then you're not living in the text enough. I read that quietly to myself this week as I was preparing this message and I got goosebumps just sitting in my office. You do understand what he just asked for? Caleb is 85 years old. He has spent 40 years wandering the desert because everyone else said it couldn't be done. You would think after all that he would just ask for the easy land. Give me the nice fertile, easy to work land with the weakest cities and the weakest people. Caleb deserves that.

He's had this unshakeable vision, focusing on the promise not the problem. He's had an unwavering attitude as he wholeheartedly followed the Lord. Now in his mid 80's when you think he should just find a nice quiet piece of the promise land to kick his feet up and relax, instead he asks for the biggest baddest boys in the toughest place to do battle.

Caleb doesn't want the easy way out, he wants to finish strong, so I'll take on those giants and if the Lord is with me I'll drive them out of the mountains just like the Lord said it would happen. Caleb was so optimistic about his chances because of his unfailing confidence in the Lord. He was fully dependent on the Lord's power and fully trusting in the Lord's presence.

Caleb reminds us that you need to face your giants.

**- Face your giants.**

Your giants may not be literal like they were for Caleb, but you still have giants to face. Maybe it's a sin you need to give over to God and repent. Maybe God is calling you to do something, or take some step of faith and like Caleb you need to have that unfailing confidence in what God can do through you, and take the step. Maybe God is pushing you to step into a place of leadership. Maybe that leadership is in your own home. Maybe it's here in the church.

Ask God to show you where your giants are, and then like Caleb go face them with all the confidence being in God not yourself. If you want to finish strong you have to face your giants. Philippians 3:13-14 says, "No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us."

That's how you finish strong. Caleb asked for his giants and Joshua gave it to him. Joshua 14:13-14 says, "So Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave Hebron to him as his portion of land. Hebron still belongs to the descendants of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite because he wholeheartedly followed the Lord, the God of Israel."

How do you finish well. You have an unshakable vision, an unwavering attitude, an unfailing confidence, but most of all you wholly follow the Lord. With everything that you got and everything that you are, you follow him and his will for your life. Not matter where that takes you, even it means you have to fight some giants, you go with God. Will you finish strong?



Many of you have expressed your thanks and appreciation for my ministry here, and I am humbled by your kind words. You have expressed how much you will miss me and will certainly miss you (most of you). Remember that this was never about me. It was always about Him, it was always about the Lord. That's who you follow. Caleb didn't wholeheartedly follow Moses, or wholeheartedly follow Joshua. He wholeheartedly followed the Lord.

I was sent here to be the Lord's servant and shepherd, but he's the one you follow. I've never written or said a single thing that gave me goosebumps, but this word does it to me often. My prayer and my hope is that you will all finish strong, not by following some minister, but by wholly following the Lord. May he find us all as faithful as Caleb. Finish strong church, by wholly following the Lord.