

The Minority Report

Forgotten Lives . . . Remembered Truths, Part 3

Numbers 13 & 14

I would imagine that not many of us would claim to be fearless.

Even the bravest among us have their limits.

From the world of sports – there are those of us who would go cliff diving but not hang gliding; there are those who will go hang gliding but never go sky diving!

I remember a few years ago a man in our church informed me that he was a trained sky diver and a sky diving coach – he even jumped with folks, attached to their harness so that all they had to do was enjoy the free fall and he'd pull the chord and navigate the landing. He told me to call him anytime I wanted to skydive; so far I haven't wanted to.

I've jumped off a cliff into a rock quarry filled with water – but I knew there was water . . . I've jumped sand dunes in a Volkswagen bug . . . but there was sand underneath me. In fact, when my parents hear this sermon on the radio they're going to suddenly discover why that Volkswagen didn't last as long as it should've.

Many people are afraid to fly in an airplane . . . I've read that statistically you are more likely to be fatally kicked to death by a horse than you are to die in a plane crash?

Some of you are thinking – I'm going to stay away from airplanes *and* horses!

I've read that driving in your car is ten times a greater threat to your health than having surgery – yet we worry over surgery and think nothing about getting behind the wheel of a car!

A couple of years ago, preparing for surgery on my broken knee cap, for the first time in my adult life, I was lying on a cot, preparing for outpatient surgery. It had been nearly 45 years since any kind of hospital stay for me – my last one was as a kid when they took out my appendix.

I lay there on that bed – hooked up to an IV, dressed in that lovely blue down – designed for neither warmth nor personal dignity. They just want to humiliate you before they take all your money.

A middle aged nurse came in and said, "Honey, I need to take your blood pressure." She called me

honey because she called everybody honey . . . at least I hoped so.

She enclosed my upper arm with that Velcro wrap and began to take my blood pressure. Suddenly she stopped and said to me, "Now listen honey, your blood pressure is way out of line – what you need to do is think some happy thoughts." I said, "What?" She said, "That's right – your blood pressure is way too high – you need to think some happy thoughts and I'll take it again." What kind of theology is that?

So I lay there and began to think . . . of the New England Patriots losing the super bowl. No, I thought of a field of flowers next to a lake – with no rapids.

She said, "Now there . . . that's better."

It was embarrassing to me to think that my worry over surgery was actually showing up on that blood pressure machine. I thought I had it well covered.

Truth was, I didn't like the risk of surgery I was about to go through.

But the truth is I took a greater risk just driving to the hospital.

You take a risk every time you take a sip of water from the tap – or from a plastic bottle.

Purchasing a home or an automobile is a risk to your future finances.

Eating out at a restaurant is a risk to your health.

There's no way to avoid every risk in life.

I read a parable about a knight in armor during the days of King Arthur. He was about to embark on a long journey, so he tried to anticipate all his possible challenges.

- he wore his sword and a full coat of armor in case he met up with some enemies;
- he brought along an axe for chopping firewood in case it grew cold
- he packed a tent and blankets in case there wasn't a nearby home to provide him hospitality;
- he brought a bow and plenty of arrows in case he needed to hunt;

- he brought along an assortment of pots and pans that jangled from his saddle bags in case he needed to cook;
- he even brought a large jar of medicinal salve in case he picked up poison ivy along the way.

He rode out of the castle and across the draw bridge that spanned the moat, clanking, swaying and clanging. When he'd made it halfway across the drawbridge, the boards gave way under all that weight and the knight fell into the river and drowned.

The moral of the story offers two possible conclusions:

- Number 1: he should have packed a life jacket;
- Or number 2 – it is impossible to plan for every danger in life.

I want to take a look at a living illustration of a fearless follower of faith; a man who is going to take the risk of being different . . . of being numbered in the minority.

I want to show you a man who was willing to take that kind of risk . . . and stand alone – not for a week or a month or a year – but for nearly 50 years.

Take your Old Testament and turn to the ***Book of Joshua, chapter 14.***

Let me show you a courageous man whose courage will go largely unrewarded for 50 years.

His name is Caleb.

Now in ***Joshua 14***, the time has come for Joshua to divide the land of promise – land for each tribe to conquer and possess – land that was promised by God decades earlier.

Look at verse 6. Then the sons of Judah drew near to Joshua in Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know the word which the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea. 7. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought word back to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt with fear; but I followed the Lord my God fully.

Don't miss that – none of the people would take the risk and trust the promise of God – Caleb says, "But I did . . . Joshua – you remember don't you?"

In fact, hold your finger here and turn back to the Book of ***Numbers and chapter 13*** where this signature event is recorded.

By the way, you might be surprised to learn that it won't be Joshua doing all the talking – it will be Caleb.

While you're turning there, for those of you younger in the faith, Caleb, Joshua and 10 other men went into the land of Canaan to spy out the fortresses of their enemies, the produce of the land and the strength of the warring tribes.

It wasn't a trip to decide whether or not they would follow the command of God and judge the nations and possess the land – it wasn't a trip to decide – it was a trip to strategize.

Notice how Moses instructs these 12 spies in ***chapter 13:18. And see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. 19. And how is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are they like open camps or with fortifications? 20. And how is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land.***

Verse 22 informs us that the spies came to Hebron where the three giant descendants of Anak lived – tuck that away for later.

Notice verse 23. Then they came to the valley Eschol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two men.

Jewish tradition states that it was actually Joshua and Caleb who carried the cluster back to Moses and the Israelites. We do know that they were the only ones who will bring back any good news.

By the way, I find it fascinating that to this day, the logo for Israel's Tourism department is two men carrying a cluster of grapes on a pole between them.

Well here is young Joshua and Caleb returning with what turns out to be the minority report.

Notice ***verse 27 as the spies give their report, We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey*** – in other words, it's fertile and bountiful – and ***look here at its fruit*** . . . and everybody is oohing and aahing – look at those grapes.

Look at verse 28. Nevertheless . . . uh oh . . . nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there (these are a giant race from which Goliath will descend)

The people erupt in terror.

Notice *verse 30*. ***Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.”***

By the way, did you notice who’s doing the talking? Not Joshua – but Caleb.

Joshua is standing there, no doubt, agreeing. Later, in ***chapter 14*** Joshua and Caleb will together plead with the nation to trust the Lord and not be afraid – to not rebel against God’s plan for their inheritance of the land.

Yes, they had seen the giants of Hebron as well. Yes, they had seen the fortified cities of Jericho and as well.

But while the other men magnified the giants, Caleb and Joshua magnified the power of God.

Caleb and Joshua didn’t try to ignore or erase the problems in the land; they simply embraced the promises of the Lord.

Look at ***verse 10 of chapter 14 – But all the congregation said to stone them with stones.***

How’s that for being in the minority?

Imagine, you’re following God’s word . . . you’re obeying God’s command . . . you’re walking in faith and attempting to influence others to follow God too . . . and they’re gathering stones!

Suddenly the brilliant Shekinah glory of God fills the Tabernacle and God comes to speak with Moses and deliver His sentence of judgment.

If you look over at ***verse 29***, God delivers the sentence, ***“Your corpses shall fall in this wilderness – in other words, you’d rather stay in the desert, so I’ll let you stay here – from 20 years old and upward.***

In other words, to all those 20 years of age and older, God delivers this irreversible sentence – ***verse 30. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.***

By the way, before we leave this scene, I want you to see God’s personal biographical statement – look back at ***Numbers 14:24***. Here’s a verse to memorize and imitate – ***But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.***

My servant Caleb . . . he has a different spirit . . . [what do you mean] he follows me without reservation.

Now go back to Joshua 14 and understand that you are fast forwarding the tape of Caleb’s life.

Look at ***verse 10*** where Caleb is speaking to Joshua – look at the last line of verse 10: ***I am eighty five years old today.***

The forty years of wandering are over . . . the young people have grown up and now have entered the land, defeated Jericho and more.

It’s time for the tribes of Israel to conquer their individual inheritance from God in this land promised to Abraham.

And notice – it’s 45 years later and Caleb is the first in line.

He’s still able to see the problems, but he only sees the problems in light of God’s promises.

I’m 85 years old and ready to go.

I can’t wait to meet Caleb, by the way. What a pioneer . . . what a spirit . . . what a walk of faith.

Keep in mind he was born a slave. About the time he’d been born, a man named Moses had fled his adopted mother’s palace and disappeared.

Caleb had grown up to feel the lash of the Egyptian taskmaster. He’d learned to make bricks without straw. He longed for a deliverer and he longed to see the promise of God’s redemption from Egypt become a reality.

Then Moses reappears – Caleb lives through the plagues with all of Israel – struck by the power of their living God.

He had been thrilled to join several million Jews who walk out of Egypt and through the Red Sea as it parts.

Caleb had tasted water from the Rock . . . he’d eaten his fill of manna – he had marveled at the faithfulness and providence of God.

He’d seen the giants in Hebron, but who were they compared to God?

By the time you reach ***Joshua chapter 14***, it’s been a lifetime for Caleb. It’s been a lifetime since he’d been to Hebron and tasted those grapes from the vine.

It’s been over 40 years and now – now – Caleb is finally back on the threshold of the promised land.

But now, he’s 85 years old.

The Jewish traditions divided old age into three stages:

- from 60-70 was called “the commencement of old age.”
- from 70-80 years of age, they referred to them as “hoary headed years” – or the years of white hair;
- and someone over 80 years of age was simply referred to as “well stricken in years”. Almost sounds like you’re being punished

for having lived that long – you are now well stricken in years.ⁱ

Most people would be looking for a nursing home – Caleb is ready to build a home, in Hebron.

Notice *verse 13, So Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance.*

Why would Caleb want Hebron? Let me tell you something about it – and why would he want a city guarded by giants.

Hebron was located right 20 miles from Jerusalem.

- It was in these Judean hills of Hebron where Abraham came and worshipped God.
- It was in Hebron where God spoke the promises of the covenant to him;
- it was in Hebron where Abraham illustrated his faith in the coming resurrection by placing his deceased wife Sarah in a cave he bought there.
- It was in Hebron where Jacob lived.
- It was in Hebron where Jacob's favorite son Joseph tended the sheep.
- It was in Hebron where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rebecca, Leah and Joseph were buried.
- This was one of the most sacred spots to the Israelite nation. It was the place that signified communion with God.

This hill country of Hebron means friendship or fellowship with God.

In the analogy of scripture, the believer who follows fully after God will find that place of communion with God to be guarded as it were by giants – every obstacle possible – every challenge imaginable thrown in your way to prevent your walk of faith and your Hebron – your communion with God.

Let's learn several lessons from Caleb's testimony:

First, the walk of faith does not erase the problems of life – and as we've learned, what's needed most is a different perspective.

Is it surprising that this place where Caleb would settle by faith and so enjoy communion with God – is it really surprising to learn that this was the place guarded by giants?

You see, the majority of spies who earlier entered the land saw the giants and measured themselves

against the giants; Caleb saw the giants and measured them against God.

But they were still giants to Caleb . . . giants he would have to overcome by faith and trust in his omnipotent God.

The walk of faith does not erase the problems of life.

Secondly, let me say the same thing another way: when you desire to follow after God, you invite trouble to come after you.

There **are** giants ready to stand in the way of those who desire, like Caleb, to follow fully after God.

Life gets complicated when you desire to take a stand for God.

Like that little 3rd grader who came up to me after a morning service two weeks ago and with absolute sincerity and concern, asked me how he should respond to his 3rd grade teacher telling the class that animals evolved. I told him to be respectful . . . not make it an issue in a public setting, but to talk to his teacher after class and tell him that he believed in a Creator God. I told him that he was now old enough – as a third grader – to understand what it means to be in the minority . . . and to stand alone.

Think about it – his desire to honor God has created a problem – a dilemma – third grade just isn't going to be as fun and carefree anymore.

When you follow after God, you invite trouble to come after you.

Thirdly, when you desire the sacred place of communion, you will discover it is an uphill climb.

Just make up your mind to spend time in God's word and watch how many things suddenly appear out of nowhere to crowd your calendar and cloud your mind.

That's why spiritual disciplines are called – disciplines. They aren't referred to as spiritual vacations; spiritual entertainments – they are first and foremost, spiritual disciplines.

But you will consider that uphill climb worthwhile.
One more:

Fourthly, the desired promises of God develop the most faith in those who are willing to wait.

Imagine, Caleb has been denied his inheritance –

- he has suffered the penalty of having to wait because of the faithlessness of his nation –
- he has suffered because of the ungodly rebellion of his own people –
- he was overruled by the majority and he had been the one who was right all along –
- he has had to wait for the fulfillment of God’s plan that brought decades of judgment.

Caleb has literally waited nearly 50 years to see this day finally come.

And when it came – you discover here that Caleb hadn’t turned bitter, or resentful, or isolated, or angry at God for all he’d had to suffer because of the sins of others; instead, this man is ready and raring to charge the hill country of Hebron.

And it’s interesting that 6 times in the biography of Caleb you have this same basic phrase repeated – expanded it reads – Caleb followed God with a fully devoted heart. 6 times – he followed God with a fully devoted heart. (Joshua 14:8, 9, 14; Numbers 14:24; 32:12; Deut. 1:36)

Which is another way of saying he followed God with no regrets . . . no reserves . . . and no retreats.

And now that he’d turned 85 and he’s *well stricken in years*, things are just beginning to take off.

That reminds me of another hero of the walk of faith – most of us know something of George Mueller.

By the time he turned 70 he’d built orphanages and was caring for a little more than 2,000 boys and girls. He work had started with just a handful of little orphan girls.

He did so in part because when he and his wife began taking in young girls in 1832, in England

there were nearly 10,000 children in prison under the age of eight.

But most of all, he wanted to see God’s providence and promises unveiled.

The started their ministry to children with – according to their journal records, with little money, three dishes, twenty-eight plates, three basins, one jug, four mugs, three saltshakers, one grater, four knives and five forks.

They would end up providing for over 10,000 orphans in all; distributing 2 million Bibles; three million books and gospel tracts and establishing 117 schools. But then George Mueller turned 70. That was the years of the white hair, right? He decided that it was time for a change.

In his early years, just after coming to faith in Christ, he had offered himself as a candidate for the mission field five different times – and had been rejected every time. Now, right around 45 years later, he decided that he didn’t need a mission board anyway and started out on his own. He would travel over the next 20 years, some two-hundred thousand miles, visit 42 countries and preach 6,000 times.ⁱⁱ

He became a living demonstration to hundreds of thousands of people that God is – *Hebrews 11:6*, one of his favorite texts – *God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*”

Which is another way of saying – God has reserved special communion for those who follow God fully – and at the age of 91 George Mueller said, “I am unspeakably happy.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I can just see Caleb, on the mountain of Hebron, having settled his family and built his home and established the worship of the one true and living God – saying, “I am unspeakably happy.”

Not because life had been easy . . . but because it was the commitment of their lives, as it should be ours, to follow God with a fully devoted heart.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/25/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i John Philipps, *Introducing People of the Bible: Volume 2* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1993), p. 17

ii Phillips, p. 23

iii Ibid