

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

For example

Presented by Steve Cooper

Good morning! We all need faith and courage to deal with what life throws at us.

In our church is a couple who are currently facing a very tough time. The man was diagnosed with brain cancer, and underwent surgery. Since the operation he has been physically weak and slow in recovery. Now the doctor has discovered another cancer on his brain, and they face the ordeal of surgery again.

As the pastor of this couple, I sat with them, heard their anxiety, and shed tears with them. They desperately need faith and courage for the hard times ahead.

It's wonderful that in the Bible we have accounts of people who faced similar challenges, yet inspire us with faith and courage. This morning I want to tell you about **Caleb**, a favourite Bible character of mine who is such an inspiring example.

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For me, one of the most inspiring people of faith and courage in the biblical record is **Caleb**. In particular, the Book of Joshua (chapter 14) points to Caleb as an example of adventurous faith.

Israel's tribes had initially conquered the land of Canaan, but they still had much to do in cleaning out the Canaanite people and occupying their various tribal allotments. Caleb is put forward as the example of the kind of obedience to God, faith and courage that should have been true of all the Israelite tribes. Instead, in chapters 13-17 there runs a melancholy refrain: 'there are still very large areas of land to be taken over (13:1) ... they could not dislodge the Canaanites, to this day they live among them (16:10) ... the Israelites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region, so they could not drive them out completely (17:12-13)' Again and again we read that the Israelite tribes failed to obey God's instruction to complete the conquest. That's why Caleb stands out. His faith and courage are such a contrast to the hesitant caution of the rest of God's people.

Let's look more closely at the words and actions of Caleb in Joshua 14, and see what we can learn about being people of faith and courage.

First, Caleb was gripped by **the promises of God**. When we look at his speech to his old friend Joshua, Caleb refers repeatedly to what the Lord or Moses had promised him. Caleb said: 'You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God about you and me ... On that day Moses swore to me, "The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children for ever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly ... Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for 45 years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert (Joshua 14:6,9,10.' Five times Caleb hammers this point home: his request is simply what God has promised him. Even though it was 45 years since God had made these promises to Caleb, he had treasured those promises and waited patiently for God to fulfil them.

Here is true faith. Faith takes what God has said in his word seriously, and depends on God to keep his promises. Faith for us means the same thing: take the promises of God, turn them into prayers, and plead with God to keep his promises. Of course, we need to take care that we properly interpret those promises so we are relying on what God has truly promised those who follow Jesus.

In a moment, let's consider another aspect of Caleb's example of faith and courage.

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This morning we're considering the inspiring example of Caleb, a man the Bible presents to us as an example of faith and courage. We've seen that Caleb was gripped by the promises of God.

A second aspect of his faith and courage is that Caleb **completely followed the Lord**, even when it was unpopular. This truth is repeated three times in Joshua 14. Moses had said this of Caleb (14:9), Caleb says it of himself (14:8), and the writer of Joshua affirms it by recording: 'So Hebron has belonged to Caleb ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly (14:14).'

What we see of Caleb here at age 85 is not just one high point of faith in his life, but the result of a lifetime of wholehearted obedience to the Lord. At age 40 Caleb had been one of 12 spies sent to investigate the land of Canaan (that story is recorded in Numbers 13-14). The majority of those spies, 10 of them, had been terrified at Canaanite cities which were highly fortified, and the military warriors who seemed like such giant bruisers. Perhaps it would be equivalent to us pitching a primary school rugby league team against a professional NRL team! Caleb had the courage, with Joshua, to go against the flow. He was willing to give a minority report, even though it nearly cost him his life (Num 14:6-10). His report was: We can possess the land; the Lord is with us; stop fearing those big giants.

Caleb is an inspiration to us in our own secular society. It's not easy to stand for God and God's values. The Christian teenager knows what this is like, when he or she must go against the moral and ethical flow of high school culture. The Christian executive who tells his superior that he must either resign or be transferred to another department, because he refuses to line up prostitutes for the company's weekend visitors – that man knows this loneliness. We may become isolated and even mocked. But Caleb didn't flinch from following the Lord completely even when it meant standing alone or with an unpopular minority.

One final aspect of Caleb's faith and courage is this: he relished facing formidable obstacles simply because he **anticipated the Lord's help**. Listen to his stirring words: 'I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said (Joshua 14:12).'

Here's an older man, 85 years old, at an age when most are thinking of security, comfortable retirement and taking it easy, yet he's eager for conflict! Caleb knew what the Lord's clear directions were, and the promise of the Lord's help. He knew that God is great, faithful and almighty, who delights to strengthen his people when they do God's will, and Caleb was keen to step out in dependence on such a God.

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Caleb was an inspiring example to us of faith and courage in the face of challenges and tough obstacles. He not only requested land that contained strongly fortified cities and terrifying warriors, but Caleb did take action to conquer this hill country, and the Lord granted him success. In Joshua 15 we read: 'In accordance with the Lord's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb Hebron. From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites. From there he marched against the people living in Debir (15:13-15).'

So the God who had

promised a secure inheritance enabled Caleb and his clan to obtain it when they were willing to risk obedience to God's promise.

But sadly, most of the Israelites lacked the faith and courage of Caleb. They were fearful and hesitant. They were not willing to take on the enemy and completely conquer the land. One disappointing example is recorded in Joshua 17 (vv.14-18). These Josephites were intimidated, cautious, complaining, hesitant and fearful. What a sad contrast to Caleb, who is confident, eager for the challenge, taking a bold initiative of faith.

Caleb is such a positive example to us of faith and courage. That's the kind of faith and courage I hope I'll have if I reach the age of 85! The basic difference between Caleb and the rest of God's people was what their eyes were fixed on. Most people looked at the giants, the fortified cities, the Canaanites entrenched in the land. Caleb saw all that, but he also saw the adequacy of a mighty God. God had commanded them to finish the conquest, to trust the Lord and remove the evil Canaanites completely.

It's a challenge to our faith today. We too have fears, and often the obstacles seem too hard to overcome, but our great God is adequate and powerful to meet our most dreadful fears. The challenges we face may make us feel hesitant, but we can be people of faith and courage. Caleb's example tells us we can trust in God's promises, we can wholeheartedly obey this powerful God, and we can enthusiastically face the obstacles as we rely on God's help.

The God we learn of in the Bible is certainly able to give us faith and courage to meet the challenges life throws at us. Caleb is a great example to us of what that faith and courage looks like. The first thing Caleb did was to give attention to God's word, and to treasure God's promises. Then Caleb gave wholehearted obedience to God, even when it was unpopular. Finally, Caleb relished facing formidable obstacles, simply because he anticipated the Lord's help.

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In *Pilgrim's Progress* John Bunyan describes Christian's approach to the Palace Beautiful where he hoped to get lodging (p.48). He began to walk down a very narrow passage leading to the porter's lodge. Then he saw two lions in the way. Bunyan adds these words: 'The lions were chained, but he saw not the chains.' That is frequently our case – we fear because we don't see the chains. Yet the fact that Christ sits at God's right hand 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion' and has 'all things under his feet' (Eph. 1:20-22) means that every power that would destroy us is chained. But, often, we don't see the chains.

Let me pray for you:

Father God, give us faith in you and courage as we face the obstacles and challenges that lie before us. Help us trust in your promises, obey you regardless of what others are doing, and rely on you to help as we tackle the difficulties. We pray in the mighty name of Jesus, our risen and exalted Lord. Amen.