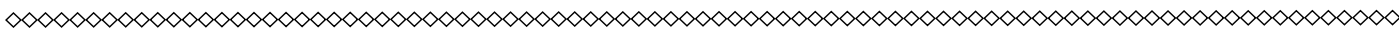




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Sermon Brief
Text: Joshua 14:6-14
Title: Courage to Face the Difficult
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

“Give me the hard job.” Not a request that comes very often, and especially in church life. Most everyone wants the simple, easy job that can be done quickly and without much effort. The story of Caleb in the Old Testament presents us with a challenging example of a person who went against the stream even in his day and it was noticed and recorded as a permanent part of Israelite history. Turn with me to Joshua 14:6-14.

6 Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal; and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh-barnea concerning you and me. 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 him an honest report. 8 But my companions who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; yet I wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God. 9 And Moses swore on that day, saying, “Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God.’ 10 And now, as you see, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel was journeying through the wilderness; and here I am today, eighty-five years old. 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, for war, and for going and coming. 12 So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day; for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; it may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out, as the Lord said.” 13 Then Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. 14 So Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholeheartedly followed the Lord, the God of Israel.

The scene of our text is during the time of the division of the Promised Land to the twelve tribes of Israel. The initial conquest of Canaan under Joshua had been completed; now the task was for the individual tribes to complete the conquest of their assigned territory. Verses 1-5 set up our passage with a description of how the land was divided out.¹ Our text focuses on the request of Caleb² to receive the territory around Hebron promised to him by Moses and by God some forty five years earlier.³

Caleb was one of the twelve spies that Moses had sent out to check the land when the Israelites were encamped at Kadesh-Barnea on the south fringe of the land of promise. Numbers 13 describes their experience. When they returned to give their report, only Joshua and Caleb gave a favorable report; the other ten men thought the territory too well fortified to be captured.

25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought

¹NRSV: “1 These are the inheritances that the Israelites received in the land of Canaan, which the priest Eleazar, and Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the families of the tribes of the Israelites distributed to them. 2 Their inheritance was by lot, as the Lord had commanded Moses for the nine and one-half tribes. 3 For Moses had given an inheritance to the two and one-half tribes beyond the Jordan; but to the Levites he gave no inheritance among them. 4 For the people of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim; and no portion was given to the Levites in the land, but only towns to live in, with their pasture lands for their flocks and herds. 5 The Israelites did as the Lord commanded Moses; they allotted the land.”

²Note two other texts affirming the same essential point, by describing Caleb’s conquest of Hebron:

Joshua 15:13-19 (NRSV): “13 According to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, he gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion among the people of Judah, Kiriath-arba, that is, Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak). 14 And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak. 15 From there he went up against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher. 16 And Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife.” 17 Othniel son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it; and he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. 18 When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, “What do you wish?” 19 She said to him, “Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me springs of water as well.” So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.”

Judges 1:12-15 (NRSV): “12 Then Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, I will give him my daughter Achsah as wife.” 13 And Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it; and he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. 14 When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, “What do you wish?” 15 She said to him, “Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also Gulloth-mayim.” So Caleb gave her Upper Gulloth and Lower Gulloth.”

³Cf. Deut. 1:36; Num. 14:24, 30; 13:33.

back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan." 30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we." 32 So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. 33 There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

The Israelites agreed with the majority report and decided they couldn't take the land. In spite of much pleading by Joshua and Caleb, along with Moses and Aaron, the people rejected their report.⁴ God then intervened with a sentence of punishment upon the people because of their rejection of the leadership of Moses.⁵ With that the Israelites changed their mind, and against Moses' instructions, they attempted an invasion and were soundly defeated.

Our text comes some 45 years later after this generation of Israelites had died off, except for Joshua and Caleb. Under Joshua's leadership the land was successfully invaded and the initial conquest carried out.⁶ At this point Joshua sought to carry out the division of the land according to the Lord's earlier instructions. Caleb then came to Joshua at Gilgal with the reminder that God had promised him the territory around Hebron⁷ where the Anakim, the giants, lived.⁸ It was perhaps the most difficult territory to conquer throughout the Land of Promise, but Caleb was convinced that God in promising him this territory would also help him take control of it and settle it for his family and descendants.

The scene is dramatic. This 85 year old Israelite with Kenizzite background comes to Joshua with the reminder of God's promise to him some 45 years earlier. He asked for one of the tougher assignments in

⁴Num. 14:1-10a NRSV: 1 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt." 5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. 6 And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, "The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only, do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them." 10 But the whole congregation threatened to stone them.

⁵Num. 14:10b-43.

⁶Cf. Joshua 1-12 for description.

⁷"A city in the south end of the valley of Eshcol, about midway between Jerusalem and Beersheba, from which it is distant about 20 miles in a straight line. It was built "seven years before Zoan in Egypt" (Genesis 13:18 ; Numbers 13:22). It still exists under the same name, and is one of the most ancient cities in the world. Its earlier name was Kirjath-arba (Genesis 23:2 ; Joshua 14:15 ; 15:3). But "Hebron would appear to have been the original name of the city, and it was not till after Abraham's stay there that it received the name Kirjath-arba, who [i.e., Arba] was not the founder but the conqueror of the city, having led thither the tribe of the Anakim, to which he belonged. It retained this name till it came into the possession of Caleb, when the Israelites restored the original name Hebron" (Keil, Com.). The name of this city does not occur in any of the prophets or in the New Testament. It is found about forty times in the Old. It was the favorite home of Abraham. Here he pitched his tent under the oaks of Mamre, by which name it came afterwards to be known; and here Sarah died, and was buried in the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:17-20), which he bought from Ephron the Hittite. From this place the patriarch departed for Egypt by way of Beersheba (37:14 ; 46:1). It was taken by Joshua and given to Caleb (Joshua 10:36 Joshua 10:37 ; 12:10 ; 14:13). It became a Levitical city and a city of refuge (20:7 ; 21:11). When David became king of Judah this was his royal residence, and he resided here for seven and a half years (2 Samuel 5:5); and here he was anointed as king over all Israel (2 Samuel 2:1-4 2 Samuel 2:11 ; 1 Kings 2:11). It became the residence also of the rebellious Absalom (2 Samuel 15:10), who probably expected to find his chief support in the tribe of Judah, now called el-Khulil.

In one part of the modern city is a great mosque, which is built over the grave of Machpelah. The first European who was permitted to enter this mosque was the Prince of Wales in 1862. It was also visited by the Marquis of Bute in 1866, and by the late Emperor Frederick of Germany (then Crown-Prince of Prussia) in 1869.

One of the largest oaks in Palestine is found in the valley of Eshcol, about 3 miles north of the town. It is supposed by some to be the tree under which Abraham pitched his tent, and is called "Abraham's oak." (See OAK .) ["Hebron," *Easton's Bible Dictionary* online]

⁸Cf. Num. 13:33 NRSV: "There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

conquering the territory. To his credit, Joshua honored his request and assigned Hebron to him.⁹

The incident is full of helpful insight and the challenging example of Caleb still inspires folks serving God to this very day. I want to speak to you today about “Courage to Face the Difficult.” As we close out one year and stand on the threshold of a new year we all will face difficult tasks and decisions in the coming year. Life is full of “Anakims,” that is, giant challenges that oppose us and present potential barriers from serving God. How we face them reveals what kind of people we are. We can focus on the obstacles and then cringe back in fear and a sense of defeat. Or, we can look above the obstacles to focus on God and His Word. Then we can move forward in success and victory as we serve our God.

From the story of Caleb, we can learn that **courage to face the difficult** is gained from four things:

BODY

I. Integrity of Spirit, v. 7

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 him an honest report.

Caleb reminded Joshua of that day 45 years earlier when he and Joshua were the only two to bring back a positive report about invading the land of Canaan.¹⁰ Caleb’s report is here labeled ‘an honest report,’ reflecting the genuine conviction of Caleb regarding what the Israelites should do. The Hebrew text here has been translated various ways,¹¹ but the primary point is the truthfulness and sincerity of Caleb in his report. He shared what he deeply believed, even though he disagreed with everyone else except Joshua.

The challenge of Caleb is to be true to our convictions no matter what. Make sure those convictions are based on God’s Word, and then stand up for them. Integrity¹² is a critically important trait for a believer. It takes courage to stand up for what we believe. Sometimes, like Caleb, that puts us in a minority viewpoint. The fear of being different is substantial in most people. The pressure to compromise is great.

We will never be able to cope with difficult situations in our life if we compromise and don’t remain true to what God has instructed us to do.

II. Commitment to the will of God, vv. 8-9, 14

8 But my companions who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; yet I wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God. 9 And Moses swore on that day, saying, “Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God.” . . .

14 So Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholeheartedly followed the Lord, the God of Israel.

The second point to be learned from Caleb’s example is the importance of following God’s will. The phrase “wholeheartedly followed the Lord” occurs in verses 8, 9, and 14. The picture in the Hebrew text is that Caleb stood right behind God following the Lord every step of the way. He did not deviate one step to the left or to the right. Where God went, Caleb went.

What a testimony! To know God’s will and then to follow it exactly is a source of great courage. One never knows where that will take you. As David reflected in Psalms 23:4, it can lead through ‘the valley of the shadow of death.’ But David also affirmed that even while walking there, he had no fear of evil.

The will of God is where we as believers are to live out our lives. Knowing that and then following that is central to being able to face difficult times and circumstances.

III. Trust in the promises of God, vv. 6, 12

6 Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal; and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh-barnea concerning you and me. . . .

12 So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day; for you heard on that

⁹Cf. Joshua 14:13-15 (NRSV): “13 Then Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. 14 So Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholeheartedly followed the Lord, the God of Israel. 15 Now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba; this Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim. And the land had rest from war.”

¹⁰Cf. Num. 13:30 (NRSV): “But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.’”

¹¹KJV: “as it was in mine heart”; ASV, NASB, ESV: “as it was in my heart”; NLT: “from my heart a good report”; BBE: “the account which I gave him was in keeping with his desire”; Elberfelder 1905: “wie es mir ums Herz war”; NRSV, HCSB, GNT: “an honest report”; LB 1912: “ich ihm Bericht gab nach meinem Gewissen”; NIV: “a report according to my convictions”.

¹²See Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition: “1: firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values : incorruptibility, 2: an unimpaired condition; soundness, 3: the quality or state of being complete or undivided: completeness”

day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; it may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out, as the Lord said.”

Moses gave God’s promise to Caleb and Joshua that they alone would live to see the Israelites enter the land of Canaan:

But because my servant Caleb has a different attitude and has wholeheartedly followed me, I’ll bring him to the land he already explored. His descendants will possess it. (Num. 14:24, NRSV)

For 45 years Caleb waited for God to keep His promise. Now at 85 years he was about to realize this promise of God. Caleb trusted God to keep His word to him all those years. He knew that realizing the promise of God would also take a lot of hard work as well. But Caleb believed deeply that God would see him through to the end of the task, as he reflects in verse 12.

Do you have the courage to pick up a hard job in service to God? Are you prepared to see it through to its conclusion? We will have general elections to all of the church positions coming up in the next few weeks. I challenge each one of you to begin praying now for God to make it clear to you how to serve Him more effectively in this church. We have achieved some of what God wants us to accomplish during this past year. More lies in front of us, and it will take everyone contributing their part if we are to continue moving forward under God’s leadership.

IV. The renewing strength of God, vv. 10-11

10 And now, as you see, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel was journeying through the wilderness; and here I am today, eighty-five years old. 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, for war, and for going and coming.

The final source of courage to face the difficult for Caleb with the renewing strength of God in his life. Joshua 15:13-19 describes how Caleb carried out the conquest of Hebron:

13 Joshua gave Caleb, son of Jephunneh, a share of land among the people of Judah as the LORD had told them. It was Kiriath Arba (now called Hebron). Arba was the father of Anak. 14 Caleb forced out Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, three descendants of Anak from Hebron. 15 From there he marched against the people living in Debir. (In the past Debir was called Kiriath Sepher.) 16 Caleb said, “I will give my daughter Achsah as a wife to anyone who attacks Kiriath Sepher and captures it.” 17 Then Othniel, son of Caleb’s brother Kenaz, captured it. So Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah as a wife. 18 When she came to Othniel, she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. When she got down from her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What do you want?” 19 She answered, “Give me a blessing. Since you’ve given me some dry land, also give me some springs.” So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

He led and inspired the people with him to move forward in taking the territory God had promised him. God gave him the strength to accomplish this, just as Caleb had thought He would.

Isaiah 40:31 puts it this way (NRSV): “Yet, the strength of those who wait with hope in the LORD will be renewed. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and won’t become weary. They will walk and won’t grow tired.” From God we can find the strength to do His will. But how?

From Daniel we are reminded of the importance of prayer and meditation on God’s Word. Daniel had three times each day set aside for prayer and reflection.¹³ Jesus drew heavily upon prayer to the Heavenly Father in His earthly ministry.

I urge you to make use of prayer and reflection on the Bible as a major source of spiritual renewal. By sharing your heart with God in prayer, and then listening to Him share His heart with you through scripture, you will find a continuing source of spiritual renewing and refreshment coming into your life. Then through this power from Almighty God you will indeed be able to have **the courage to face the difficult**.

CONCLUSION

Caleb can teach us some valuable lessons today as we contemplate 2010 with all the challenges it will present to us. May we indeed come to have **the courage to face the difficult**.

¹³Cf. Dan. 6:10 (NRSV): “Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously.”