

“So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 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: 10 – 12.

Dear Friends,

You may recall that last week I wrote about Caleb, one of the two young spies that Moses sent out to explore the Promised Land and how he came back and offered a positive report despite his compatriots offering negative ones. I wrote about how we each have a choice about the decisions we make and the challenges we face, as individuals, as local churches and as a Methodist Circuit.

I want to return to Caleb one more time. He doesn’t get mentioned a lot in the Bible, only in about half a dozen passages but the words quoted above come from his mouth. They are spoken 45 years after the events I wrote about last week. Caleb is now eighty-five years old. The Israelites have spent forty years in the wilderness and five years in the process of conquering the peoples and tribes of the land of Canaan. That process is almost complete but Caleb has not yet received his promised inheritance for his faithfulness. He has been too busy standing alongside the other Hebrew tribes in securing the lands allotted to each of them. Now, finally it is his turn.

Whether he is still as physically vigorous as he makes out at the age of eighty-five as he was at forty, or whether it is a picture of his vigorous spirit, it is impossible to tell. But he is the head of his household and tribe and as such he is speaking on their behalf.

But the significance of this passage lies in the detail which can be easily overlooked. And there are three details I want to point out. First, Caleb asks for the hill country. He could have had his choice of the whole land. He overlooked the flat, fertile regions around the Jordan and instead asked for the mountains. Think about this: in any military battle or campaign, which is the hardest ground to take? It is the high-ground. The one holding the high-ground always has the military advantage. It is the hardest ground to take. It is the greatest challenge to face. And at age 85, Caleb says, *“I’m up for one last challenge!”*

Second, we read mention of the Anakites. These were the people that the twelve spies had originally come across forty-five years ago and reported back that the people were very big – like giants, that “we seemed like grasshoppers in our own sight and we looked the same to them!” The Anakites were the descendants of Anak, and back in Numbers 13 we are told *“We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim.)”*

Allow me a moment to explain. The Nephilim are first referred to in the Bible in Genesis 6, prior to Noah and the Great Flood. We read there: *“The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterwards – when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.”* We don’t know exactly what is meant by this but one possibility is that the author uses the phrase “sons of God” as a reference to angels. Whatever it means, the inference, the history, the tradition – the

mythology if you like – is that the Nephilim were a race of giants and that their bloodline or genes passed down through the wife of Ham, one of Noah’s sons. Anak was one of the most renowned of these giants and his descendants still lived in the land. It is not surprising then that they are among the last of the various tribes and peoples of Canaan to be faced. It is not surprising that it is left to Caleb, the man of such great faith in God and vigour of spirit, to volunteer to deal with them on behalf of the whole nation. Caleb is a true “hero of the faith.”

Sometimes, the challenges that we face seem insurmountable. They seem like giants or mountains, or even worse, giants living in mountains! But Caleb, in his old age, looks back on his life’s experiences, on what he has seen God do and what he has heard God say, and he remains resolute in his faith.

Third, in light of all Caleb has discovered about God, he recognises that he cannot face these mountains and giants alone. *“But, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out!”* Without God, the giants are too big, the mountains are too high, the ground is too difficult. But with God, the landscape changes completely. It reminds me of the beautiful imagery that Isaiah gives us in chapter 40 where we read of the comfort that God brings to his people: *“A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all the people shall see it together.’”*

May I be so bold as to channel the voice of one calling: *‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord...’* In your life, in your prayers, in your church, in our Circuit, invite God’s Spirit to work amongst us, invite God’s Spirit to guide us, to give us wisdom, strength and perseverance to face the challenges before us, to remain resolute, to embody the spiritual vigour and fervour of Caleb. It is a choice for each of us. When we face the mountains and the giants do we turn and run, do we leave it to someone else or do we put on the armour that God gives us, which Paul describes in these words: *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God... Stand firm with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. Take up the shield of faith... Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”*

Whatever the giants and mountains you face are, whatever the giants and mountains we face are, when faced with faith in God and trust in God’s promises, they can be made low.

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

Notice

Volunteer appointments:

At our recent Circuit Meeting we noted that as a Circuit we have quite a few vacant positions for volunteers which are key to us being a healthy, flourishing circuit. I am sure the case is the same at a local church level. Maybe one of the challenges you could consider is to volunteer for a new role in the life of your church or circuit. The Circuit is currently seeking volunteers for the following roles:

- Circuit Stewards
- Circuit Steward (with responsibility for property issues)
- Circuit Secretary
- Circuit Representatives to District Synod
- Circuit Rural Ministry Officer
- Circuit Environmental Officer
- Circuit Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer

- Circuit Trustee to Otley Christian Resources Hub
- Manse Steward

To find out more about any of these vacancies please contact me or your Minister.

Methodist Conference

Our annual conference takes place between June 23rd and July 1st. It has a number of significant issues to deal with this year under difficult circumstances so please pray for all those involved that they would know God's wisdom and guidance. Please also pray for all those who will be ordained in the coming days.