

Joshua (Part 11): A Whole-Hearted Follower

by Richard Siple

The sermon emphasizes the importance of whole-hearted following of God, developing real convictions, and maintaining courage and constancy in the face of opposition and change.

Duration: 38:21

Scripture: Numbers 13:33, Numbers 32:10-12, Deuteronomy 1:36, Joshua 14:6-9, Matthew 6:33, Colossians 3:1-3

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Following God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of wholeheartedly following the Lord. He references the life of John Wesley, who was a dedicated follower of God and made a significant impact on the world. The speaker then turns to the story of Joshua in the Bible, specifically focusing on Caleb's faith and conviction. Caleb was one of the twelve spies sent to explore the land of Canaan, and despite the challenges and giants they faced, he remained steadfast in his belief that God would give them victory. The speaker encourages the audience to not be discouraged by their own weaknesses, but to keep their focus on God and trust in His power.

Transcript

Good morning. I want to express my thanks again to all of those who are involved in our praise time, in our Sunday services. I am so blessed by the music in this church and those who minister Christ to us in our praise time every Sunday, and that includes the musicians and the sound people and everyone who's involved.

It is just a great blessing to me personally. You're just expressing my own appreciation and I get so involved in the praise and the worship. Sometimes I get all choked up and teary eyed and I'm not ready to preach.

It's just great. So thank you so much. I want us to think together this morning for a few minutes about what it means to follow the Lord with all my heart, all my heart.

And of course we have the greatest commandment that Jesus expressed when he was asked, what's the greatest commandment? He said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. And on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophet.

There isn't anything that God has said to us that is not summed up as far as our responsibility and our response to him is concerned. But it's so easy to take on our lips the confession of loving God with all our heart. And I know I've said it, I've heard many of you say it, I love God with all my heart.

And you're sincere in that. When you say that, of course you mean that. But when the chips are down, I wonder how it would stack up.

And the man we're going to look at this morning found himself in that position. And what challenges my heart is that he came through, that he really did wholly follow the Lord. He was a wholehearted follower of the Lord.

John Wesley said, give me a hundred men who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God. And I will shake the world. I care not a straw, whether they be clergymen or laymen and such alone will overthrow the kingdom of Satan and build the kingdom of God on earth.

Was he right? Maybe. The Bible states that Caleb followed the Lord wholeheartedly. It says it twice in the book of Numbers, once in Deuteronomy and three times in Joshua 14.

So I'm going to read those passages to you and you can follow along if you're quick with your Bibles, beginning with Numbers chapter 32 and verses 10 to 12. The Lord's anger was aroused that day and he swore this oath, because they have not followed me wholeheartedly. He's talking about the nation of Israel as a whole.

They have not followed me wholeheartedly. Not one of the men 20 years old or more who came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now that's an absolutely terrible thing because they had been led by Moses out of Egypt with great miracles, fantastic miracles.

And God had brought them forth and here they were ready to go on into the promised land, redeemed by God's grace and power from the hand of the enemy and all their slavery and bondage. And here they are a nation of two to 3 million people ready to go in to the land. And now God is saying not one man 20 years old and older will ever go in.

Terrible. God is very angry in this particular instance. Then in verse 12 it says, "Not one except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they followed the Lord wholeheartedly." That's scary.

That's not a picture of people entering into heaven or not. It's a picture of people entering into the land of victory or not. It's a picture of God's people entering the land of victory that God has promised.

And all these people that died in the wilderness that put their trust in the Lord are in heaven and you'll see them someday. But they failed to go into the land of victory and triumph that God had for them. And there are only two, two, I don't know what percentage that is.

One of you mathematicians figure it out. Out of 3 million people, two. But there were two, Caleb and Joshua.

Deuteronomy chapter 1, 34 to 36. When this is Moses speaking, "When the Lord heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore, not a man of this evil generation shall see the good land. I swore to give your forefathers, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh, he will see it.

And I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly." There it is again. Then you come down to Joshua 14 and we've been in the book of Joshua. Joshua 14, verses 6 to 14.

Now, they have gone all the way and they have crossed the Jordan and they have defeated king after king and taken city after city. And five more years have passed and they are in the land, settling in the cities, taking over the land of Palestine. Now, the men of Judah approached Joshua, Gilgal and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses, the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me." He's talking to Joshua now, who is now leading the nation.

"I was 40 years old when Moses, a servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions." Now, the scene was that Moses sent 12 spies into the land to spy it out. And they came back and they said, "There are great walled cities, there are great armies, there are giants, eight, nine feet tall.

We look like grasshoppers next to them." And 10 of the spies said, "It's a wonderful land, but there's no way we can go in there." And Caleb and Joshua said, "God will be with us and we can do it." You get the picture? Now, 40 years wandering in the wilderness, then five years of invasion into Palestine. And here they are. And Caleb is saying, "I brought back a report according to my convictions, but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear.

I, however, followed the Lord with my God wholeheartedly. So on that day, Moses swore to me, the land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for 45 years." That's longer than he had been alive before he went into the land.

"Since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert, so here I am today, 85 years old." And this next one really throws me. "I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me. I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.

Now give me this mountain." Oh, I love that. It, I feel like I'm way back behind there somewhere. But what a man, huh? Whoa.

"Now give me this mountain that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the giants were there, their cities were large and fortified, but the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said. Then Joshua blessed Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.

So Hebron has belonged to Caleb, son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel wholeheartedly." Now, I hope I've run that word into the ground. But God is the one who ran it into the ground. He said it in three different books of the Old Testament, and he said it again and again.

He said it in the mouth of Moses, and he said it in the mouth of Joshua, and he said it in the mouth of Caleb. He said, I have followed the Lord with all my heart. Nothing held back.

Now, what did this mean in the life of Caleb? And as we look at it, it may help us. I think from the words of my text, it meant three things mainly. Convictions, and courage, and constancy.

Now, convictions. Godly convictions are commitments based on the word of God and the character and attributes of God. Now, I wanna say that again slowly.

Please let this sink in. You say, I have convictions. I hope you do.

Christian convictions, Christian convictions, are commitments based on the word of God and the character and attributes of God. Real Christian convictions have to be based on the word of God and who God is and what he is and what he is like. It's easy to talk about our convictions, but sometimes what we discover, all of us, is that the things that we thought were convictions were not real convictions because when the chips were down, we didn't hold.

Huh? Come on. We've all been there. And it's one of the things that bothers me the most because one of the pillars in my life is I believe this book.

Do you? I believe this book. I have committed my life to believing this book. I believe everything in it from one end to the other.

Amen? But when the chips are down, then do I really believe it? How deep are my convictions? What is the process to these convictions about God and about what he has said and what he will do? Well, first of all, you have to search out the situation. They spied out the land. Like they didn't just close their eyes.

They didn't bury their head in the sand. They actually went in. They spied out the land.

They saw what was there. They knew the situation. There isn't any such thing as real blind faith.

Faith is not blind. Faith is based on God. It's based on knowing the circumstances and knowing God.

And so, yes, they faced the situation honestly. 10 of them said, we can't do it. Two of them said, of course we can't do it, but God can do it.

And so we're gonna trust God and we're going forward trusting him and we're going to obey him and we're going to put our confidence in him and we're going to expect him to work in our lives. And so they saw the situation clearly. They understood it.

Then they searched the scriptures. That is, they looked at God's promises. What had God said? God had said, I've given you this land.

I've given it to you. It's yours, take it. And 10 of them said, we don't really believe that.

Now, if you'd asked them, do you believe God and believe his word? They would have said, oh yes, oh, absolutely. I believe God and all his word and everything he said. But then if you said, all right, God said, I have given you this land, go in and take it.

They would have said, well, wait a minute. You haven't seen the walls of those cities and you haven't seen those giants and you haven't seen the armies and all the problems and everything. So our convictions are put to the test and we have to compare what God has said with what we see.

You don't close your eyes to what you see, but you look at it honestly and squarely and sincerely, but you also look at God over against it. And what he has said, what his promises are, his character, his attributes, and you trust his word. And then you follow.

Real convictions always produce action. If you don't act on your convictions, you probably don't really have the convictions. See, you can have convictions up here, but they don't get to your feet.

See, somebody says, I believe that God, you know, God's word says it. I believe God could use me to lead somebody to Christ, but they've been a Christian 40 years and never tried it. Oh, it's getting quiet.

You know, have you ever stopped to think how hard it is for people to preach things with God's finger pointing at them? And when I preach about something like this, it really is hard to do because all the time when I'm getting ready, when I'm preparing the sermon and I'm praying and I know I'm gonna preach it and God is searching my heart and he's saying, and where are you? You know, the things you have as convictions that you say you believe, how much do you believe them? And are you willing to put yourself on the line? It's hard searching, isn't it? So convictions, what are our convictions? I came across a little poem that says, should all the forms that men devise attack my faith with treacherous art, I'll call them vanities and lies and bind God's truth upon my heart. I am convinced that one of the greatest problems among God's people, and I mean God's people born again on their way to heaven is a lack of real deep conviction because we live in a day of shallowness, great shallowness, especially of commitment. People are not committed to anything and they're very shallow.

For instance, I've watched the news on CNN for a long time. I am angry at them and I'm not gonna watch them anymore because they stabbed Aaron Brown in the back and took away his job and put a young guy in his place who doesn't compare with him and I'm mad at them. Gotta find somebody else to watch the news from because they had a man of integrity and they couldn't put up with him.

Oh, you check it out. My wife did all the research, she has that gift. I kept worrying and grumbling about it and so she did the research.

And they fired him. Now, if you haven't been listening to him, it doesn't make you mad. But you see, people don't have any convictions.

All they wanna know is, let's see, how many listeners do we have? Can we make more money if we put somebody younger and a little sillier and so forth in there? Right? People, I believe that God wants us to explore our convictions and see how deep we believe what we say we believe. So Caleb had convictions and he had courage. He had the courage of his convictions.

You've heard people say the courage of your convictions. Yes. Courage, what is courage? It doesn't mean you're not afraid, it means you do it anyway.

People that aren't afraid don't need courage, right? If you're not afraid, it doesn't take any courage to do it. But if you're afraid, it takes courage to do it. And he had courage.

Actions that flow from true convictions. It means to stand by my convictions and carry them out in spite of opposition, rejection, and personal danger. And these men were in danger.

In fact, back when they made this commitment and said, we can go in and do it, the Israelites, and there were a lot of them, they were gonna stone them to death. I'll tell you, if you have convictions based on God's word, you will find sometimes not only your enemies are against you, but your friends. You'll find some of your Christian friends that won't agree because it makes them feel uncomfortable because you took a stand for the word of God.

And that takes courage, absolutely. He dared to stand against both enemies and friends. Never be afraid to stand with the minority when they are right, for the minority which is right will someday be the majority.

And the majority which is wrong will someday be the minority. Remember, one man and God are a majority. I love that statement.

It's not in the Bible, but it's one of my favorite statements. You're gonna hear me say it over and over. You have already.

I hope that it bugs you. One man and God are a majority, right? You better believe it. Absolutely.

So when it's right, and I don't mean when it's just your own personal belief or your own personal theology or some book you just read or some preacher you like to listen to, but when it's the word of God and it's clear, you need to stand. Frederick the Great, a great king, by the way, of great power, was a scoffer. But his great general, Von Zeeland, was a Christian.

One day at a gathering, the kind, pardon me. One day at a gathering, the king was making coarse jokes about Jesus Christ, and the whole place was ringing with laughter. Von Zeeland arose stiffly and said, sire, you know I have not feared death.

I have fought and won 38 battles for you. I am an old man. I shall soon have to go into the presence of the one greater than you, the almighty God who saved me from my sin, the Lord Jesus Christ whom you are blaspheming against.

I salute you, sire, as an old man who loves his savior on the edge of eternity. Good for you. With trembling voice, King Frederick replied, General Von Zeeland, I beg your pardon.

I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. Then the company quietly dispersed.

A man with the courage of his convictions. How is my courage in public? How is my courage on the job when the people around me who aren't Christians are there? How's my courage out in the world when I'm participating in sports or when I'm doing something else that people of the world are doing and they don't believe in Christ and they don't have any reverence for God or his word and things come up? What is my courage then? There are many memorials inscribed in Westminster Abbey in England. There is none that gives a more noble thought than the one inscribed to Lord Lawrence.

It has simply his name, the date of his death, and these words, he feared man so little because he feared God so much. One of the reformers was told, all the world is against you. He replied, then I'm against all the world.

Yes, get some steel in your back. When John Knox landed on the coast of Scotland, just a preacher, Mary Queen of Scots trembled and turned white, just a preacher, afraid of the preacher. She had right to be, by the power of God, he turned Scotland inside out.

So what is the process? Well, we see the facts. We see ourselves and our weakness, but more than anything else, we see God. Don't get defeated by the grasshopper complex.

In Numbers 13.33, those 10 spies said, and there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. The grasshopper complex. So don't look at yourself, brother, sister, don't look at yourself.

Are you weak? Of course you're weak. Can you do it? No, you can't do it. Keep your eyes, where? On the Lord.

Keep your eyes on the Lord. If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above. Where Christ is seated on the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on things in the earth, for you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. Get your eyes on God and his word, and have the convictions that are real to give you the courage to obey God. Christ is bigger than any problem.

One of the reformers wrote, "Do not pray for easy lives, "but pray for strength equal to the task." The third thing in the life of Caleb I'm impressed with is his constancy, his stick-to-it-ness. That's not a real word, but what? You still believe it after 45 years? I mean, by now you should have given this up long ago. What? What? But here he is, 45 years later, and he says to Joshua, "You remember what God said, and nothing has changed, "and I'm now 85, but I wanna tell you "that I still believe God, "and I still believe with his help "that I can take that mountain." Oh, this is good news for all you old people.

I'm glad I'm not old, but. It's good news for you elderly folks. 85, woo, my, 85.

And he says, "Give me this mountain." You say, what happened? He took it. Go back and read it, he took it. He says, "I'm just as ready now." 45 years later, "I was ready then, I'm ready now." Why? Because God doesn't change.

Do people change? Yes. Do the circumstances change? Yes. But do I change? Yes.

He said he hadn't changed, that's fantastic. I have. I certainly don't have the strength I had when I was 40.

I have a little more sense. But I don't have the same strength. I'll tell you though, I still have the same faith in God.

That hasn't changed, amen? That hasn't changed at all. Why? Because God hasn't changed. Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

"I am the Lord, I change not. "Therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed." He's the same. God's promises never change.

He is the same God. Why not keep on? Why stop? "I once heard Dr. Robert G. Lee "preach his great sermon, Payday Someday. "If you never heard him preach, "it's one of the things you missed in life somehow." Great orator, fantastic.

Payday Someday. Oh, I can still see him. Pastored a great church in Memphis, Tennessee on his 84th birthday.

Dr. Lee, Pastor Emeritus of the First Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee said, "A friend asked me, are you going to keep on preaching? "I said, why not? "I am physically able, mentally sound, "spiritually desirous, and in love with Jesus. "Why not keep on preaching as I've done for 62 years?' "Good for you.' "So I keep my eyes on the Lord and the goal." William Wilberforce early became inflamed with the idea of stopping the slave trade and slavery in England. He succeeded in becoming a member of parliament, goaded by William Pitt, great man of God.

He spoke often against slavery and the slave trade, but suffered repeated defeats in parliament. This is in England. In 1807, he persuaded his colleagues to ban the slave trade, but not until 1833 did both houses of parliament finally abolish slavery in Britain.

The news of total victory came to Wilberforce on his deathbed. He was motivated in his life's career by an idea whose time had fully come. And just before he stepped through the gates into heaven, he got the news.

After all those years. We keep our eyes on the Lord and we keep taking the next step of obedience by faith. We used to sing, ■ My Lord knows the way through the wilderness.

■ It's an old one. Anybody remember? ■ All I have to do is follow. ■ Yes.

I have to give you this. It's kind of cute. Two frogs fell in a can of cream, or so I've heard it told.

The sides of the can were slippery and steep. The cream was deep and cold. Oh, what's the use croak number one.

Tis fate, no helps around. Goodbye my friends, goodbye cruel world. And weeping still he drowned.

But number two of sterner stuff, dog paddled in surprise. And while he wiped his creamy face and dried his creamy eyes, I'll swim a while at least. Why not? Or so I've heard he said.

He really would not help the world if one more frog were dead. An hour or two he kicked and swam. Not once he stopped to mutter, but kicked and kicked and swam and kicked then hopped out from the butter.

See, that's when your problem becomes your rescue. You just have to keep kicking. That's all.

And then our commitment has to be unchanged. Unchanged. Our convictions, our courage, our commitment remains unchanged.

John Wesley traveled 250 miles a day averaged for 40 years on horseback. He preached 40,000 sermons, produced 400 books and knew 10 languages. At 83 he was annoyed that he could not write more than 15 hours in a day when he was writing without hurting his eyes.

When I type too long at the computer, it doesn't only hurt my eyes, it hurts my neck and my shoulder and everything else. Well, he complained in his diary that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5.30 in the morning. On his 85th birthday, he wrote in his diary, I find some decay in my memory with regard to names and things lately passed, but not at all with what I read 20 to 60 years ago, nor do I feel any weariness either in traveling or preaching.

Wow. There have been giants in the earth sometimes that were God's giants. Amen.

Spiritual giants. What a challenge they are to us. I wanna close with a story out of the Olympic gatherings.

The sweeping expanse of Tokyo's Yoyogi Pool held more than 10,000 spectators. 17 year old Dick Roth did not see them. He did not notice the doctors hovering on the pool deck.

As he took his place for the final men's 400 meter individual medley in the 1964 Olympics, the world record holder from California was concentrating on just one thing, victory. Three days before, Roth had been diagnosed as having acute appendicitis. Only he had believed he could swim in this race.

Now only he believed he could win it. Roth's pain had started slowly after he returned to the athlete's village following the opening exercises. Dr. Hanley of the US Olympic Committee put him in the hospital and started having him prepared for immediate emergency surgery.

They were only waiting for Roth's parents to be found who were out sightseeing. While they searched, Roth made up his mind. He was not going to have that operation, he was going to swim.

When Roth's parents arrived, he was in tears and begged them to let him swim. He took some new blood tests which indicated that his white blood count had stabilized. And so against all medical advice, his parents supported Roth's wishes.

Roth spent the next three days in bed with his abdomen packed in ice. He was allowed no solid food for three days. He refused all pain medication for fear it would affect his performance.

On race day, the pain seemed to subside. There's a point in athletic competition, says Roth, where you become so focused that nothing else interferes. Roth lay in bed listening to the other events.

In the 10,000 meter track event, Billy Mills of the US was leading. Heading into the final 600 meters, he was knocked to the ground. Unbelievably, Mills picked himself up and sprinted to victory and an Olympic record.

When Billy Mills won that race, suddenly Roth knew he could do the same. In the race, Roth was unbeatable. He tore through the water to a world record and won the race going away.

After receiving his medals, Roth was flown home and had his appendectomy. I read that story and I thought of another statement, this time from the word of God. First Corinthians 9, 24 to 27.

God says, do you not know? That in a race, all the runners run, but only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.

They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly. I do not fight like a man beating the air.

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. So run to win. By the power of Christ within us, may we all have the convictions and the courage and the constancy to become wholehearted followers of our dear Lord.

Amen.

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