

Caleb the Wholehearted and the Land of Promise

by Tom Macartney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of co-operation with God's grace to enter into our inheritance and gain our spiritual progress, using the example of Caleb's wholehearted commitment to God.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:23, Matthew 13:24, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 9:24, 1 Corinthians 10:1, Ephesians 1:18, Philippians 3:14, Philippians 4:19, 2 Peter 1:10

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Christian Inheritance"

Description

Tom Macartney preaches about the deep concern running through Paul's letters for Christians to realize the greatness of their salvation, the glorious destiny they have been called to, and the infinite resources available to them. Paul's concern includes the challenge that Christians may fail to fully enter into their glorious inheritance, both in the present and future aspects. The sermon emphasizes the importance of learning key spiritual lessons to make progress in the Christian life and to fully possess the inheritance in Christ, drawing parallels between Israel's journey to the Promised Land and the believer's journey to spiritual maturity.

Transcript

When we read Paul's letters it is impossible not to note a deep concern running through them that Christians should realise the greatness of their salvation, the glorious destiny to which they have been called and the infinite resources which are theirs to meet present needs. Consider, for example, his prayer for the Christians at Ephesus (1:15-21), that "They may know the hope of His calling ... the glory of His inheritance in them, and ... the greatness of His power available to them." Consider his description of the Gospel he proclaimed as the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). What a Gospel! Consider also Phil. 4:19: "My God shall supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Christians have infinite resources to draw on in the Bank of Heaven, in the will of God and in the name of Jesus. Consider the amazing statement in Rom. 8:17, that if we are God's children, we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. What a destiny, what privileges, what wealth are ours through grace! But Paul's concern also includes a challenge, for he knows that Christians may fail to enter into this glorious inheritance, both in its present and future aspects (upon which we shall enlarge later.) Not all heirs actually enter into their inheritance. A passage such as 1 Cor. 10:1-13 shows this: while all Israel escaped from Egypt, the majority failed to enter the Land, which was God's purpose in saving them (see Deut. 6:23). Note also

Paul's concern for himself in 1 Cor. 9:24-27. He is running the race (and urging the Corinthians to do so too) so as to win the prize, realising he may not win it. He is not concerned about losing his salvation (he knows Christ has captured him), but about missing God's purpose in saving him. He writes about this again in Phil. 3:7-16: "I press on toward the goal, to win the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (verse 14). He is clearly a man pursuing his God-given inheritance with a single-minded ambition to please his Lord and be of service to Him (2 Cor. 5:9, 10). So, we too have to face this challenge. Just as the Lord set before Israel a wonderful inheritance in the Land, into which most of them failed to enter, so He has set before us a much more wonderful inheritance in His Son which we may fail to enter into or fully possess.

This concern of Paul's runs through the New Testament (consider 2 Pet. 1:1-11 and Hebrews) and also the Old Testament, so often 'God's Book of Illustrations' of New Testament teaching. So, we will turn to the history of Israel from the exodus to the entry into the Land to illuminate this great matter, and as we do, in the marvellous unity of Scripture, we shall meet Paul again so to speak, in the person of Caleb, who shines like a beacon of light in the story, for Paul is a New Testament Caleb.

After keeping the Passover, Israel escaped from Egypt through the Red Sea, under the leadership of Moses, guided and protected by the pillar of cloud and of fire, God's presence. They were then led south to Sinai to learn the will of their God and His plans for their future. After about 15 months the cloud moved north to the land of promise, their destination and destiny. When they reached the threshold of the land at Kadesh, 12 spies (or scouts) were sent out to explore (this was a mistake as we shall see.) After 40 days the 12 returned, reporting that it was a wonderful land; but 10 added that it could not be conquered because of the strength of its inhabitants, the fortified cities and the presence of giants. Caleb and Joshua tried to stem the resulting panic. Caleb said: "Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it," but the majority of the people rebelled and so were turned back to wander in the wilderness for another 38 years, until all over 20 had died, except Caleb and Joshua (and, as some think, the tribe of Levi.)

We should note the kind of man Caleb was, for he is the kind who wins the prize. Of him God said: "But My servant Caleb I will bring into the land, because he has a different spirit and has followed Me wholeheartedly."

The history of the Lord's dealings with Israel is a kind of instructive preview of His dealings with His church. So, let us now consider this part under three heads: 1) Out of Egypt; 2) Through the wilderness; 3) Into the land.

1. The meaning of the Passover and the Red Sea (where Israel 'was baptised into Moses (united to him) in the cloud and in the sea', is clear enough. "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed", and we have been "baptised into Christ ... united to Him." Here are the foundations of our redemption, the beginnings of a true Christian life, our deliverance from the kingdom of Satan, the dominion of darkness. Any uncertainty here will undermine our understanding of all that follows. Obviously, if we are not out of Egypt, the meaning of the wilderness and the land will be irrelevant.

2. In considering the wilderness, we must note at once that there are two distinct and unequal periods; a period of about 2 years (much of it spent at Sinai, and ending at Kadesh) when Israel was journeying with a purpose, and a period of about 38 years spent wandering in the wilderness. (About what happened during these wasted years very little is, in fact, recorded.) The first period was part of God's plan for His people; the second, a tragic necessity which He never intended. Failure to see this difference will confuse

our thinking about the meaning of the wilderness. The 38 years of wandering are obviously not a picture of the Christian life as intended by God. God's Plan was that His people should learn certain lessons during the two year period and then enter the Land. To these important lessons we shall presently return. They will give us a kind of ABC of the Christian life.

3. And what is the meaning of the land? It cannot represent heaven, or our final salvation, because there are no enemies in heaven to conquer; nor, some experience which will lift our lives on to a higher plain, because it took years to conquer and possess. As the Land, for Israel, was their inheritance to be possessed by conquest, so for us it must be our inheritance in Christ to be gained against enemy opposition. As the land itself is spoken of in the most glowing terms, so Paul, as we have noted, often writes of the wealth and high destiny that are ours in God's Son and yet have to be possessed through conflict. For example, in Ephesians 1 we have our wonderful inheritance presented, while in Ephesians 6 we read of the spiritual warfare in which we are all involved. The book of Joshua illuminates the Letter to the Ephesians. Once we are out of Satan's clutches (out of Egypt), he concentrates on depriving us of our inheritance and thwarting God's purpose in our salvation.

Once we see this distinction between our salvation (thought of in terms of redemption, forgiveness, new birth, our foundations (becoming Christians, escaping from Egypt), and entering into God's purpose in saving us, our inheritance in Christ (in terms of spiritual progress, holiness and likeness to Christ, growing up to maturity, proving His sufficient grace, the fulfilling of God's plan in and through our lives, entering the land), many things fall into place, much confusion is avoided and our view of the Christian life becomes clearer. Of course, God's will for all is that the first should lead to the second, but we are mistaken if we think that grace guarantees that all Christians will enter into their inheritance. All who are justified will indeed be glorified (Rom.8:30), but there are degrees of glory (and usefulness) in heaven. All true Christians will be fully delivered from sin in that great day, but likeness to Christ in character cannot be given but must be gained (entered into) through faith's co-operation with grace. Israel was not called to fight its way out of Egypt; it could do nothing to save itself. But Israel was then called upon to learn certain lessons and possess the land given it in the strength which the Lord provided. It failed to do so. So a Christian may be truly saved and still fail to gain his inheritance. All Christians are heirs of God potentially, but not all heirs do in fact grow up so as to be able to inherit their estate. If all Christians are bound to win the prize, then it would be unnecessary and misleading of Paul to write as he does. But Paul knows there is a wonderful land which may be won or lost.

It is important to get the Biblical balance between His grace and our co-operation. There is no question of earning or working for our salvation at any stage. Our inheritance is given us to possess. There is no pride of achievement in heaven. Salvation from beginning to end is all of grace. But, whereas before we are born-again we can do nothing, once we are, we have in us a new ability to work together with the Lord in working out our salvation; "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you."

So important is this matter, we must enlarge upon it further. When Israel left Egypt, a mixed multitude went out with them, a crowd of those who were not true-born Israelites. Their motives, doubtless, were mixed and varied, and they proved a snare to God's true people (Num. 11:4). In the days of Nehemiah the same problem arose (Neh. 13:3). And throughout the history of the church it has continued, this problem of the association with the people of God of those who profess to be going the same way. Under God's sovereign hand, the wilderness served a double purpose here by bringing to light these counterfeit associates, the tares among the wheat, and also the faithful such as Caleb. We find this double distinction

throughout the New Testament. In Matthew 13 we not only have the parable of the wheat (the true children of God) and the tares (professing Christians), which to begin with look like wheat (verses 24-30), but also the parable of the sower, where the good ground yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (verse 8). Here we have degrees of fruitfulness among true Christians. Because of this, there will be differences at the judgment seat of Christ, where Christians hear His verdict on their lives since conversion (2 Cor. 5:9, 10). (This has nothing to do with salvation and must not be confused with the final judgment of unbelievers in Rev. 20:11-15.) Some will have been more faithful than others, and will therefore be more useful to Him in running His kingdom. The prize includes the joy of pleasing the Lord and being useful to Him. The parables of the talents and the pounds teach us the same. It seems some truly saved Christians will have bitter regrets when they meet their Lord. Note, these parables relate to Christians (called here servants). The unprofitable servant, who wasted his life and opportunities, was not cast into hell but lost his job, a most distressing thing.

Such passages as 1 Cor. 3:1-17; 9:24-10:14 and 2 Cor. 11:1-15; 13:5, show there were in the church at Corinth not only true Christians in danger of missing their inheritance, but also false Christians. The letter to the Hebrews gives us the same overall picture of the church concerned. As we have said, this double distinction runs through the New Testament, 1) between true and counterfeit Christians, and 2) between those, among the true, who wholeheartedly follow the Lord and those who do not. To confuse the two leads to some highly unsatisfactory views, we feel. For example: all true Christians are bound to enter into their inheritance in Christ, i.e. win the prize; or failure to grow in grace proves a person is not a Christian. Of course, it is possible lukewarmness indicates a person is not truly saved, but does this mean we should regard the majority of the church at Laodicea as unsaved? Surely not. And what about the other churches in Rev. 2 and 3? It seems clear there were counterfeit Christians in some of these churches, and only a minority of 'Calebs' in any of them.

The thrust of what we are saying is quite simple. Firstly, let us each make sure that we are truly the Lord's. Secondly, let us earnestly seek to enter into all that God has given us in His Son, and beware of that spirit of unbelief and disobedience, still in us all, which ever opposes the upward urge of the Spirit of God and may rob us of God's purpose in our salvation, or part of it.

Now, should anyone feel convicted of failure, backsliding or half-heartedness by what we are considering, do not succumb to condemnation. Where there is true repentance, our God of all grace will forgive and give us a new beginning, and can overrule the past (1 John 1:9; Joel 2:25).

Here let us pause to enlarge a little on this great inheritance of ours, in which we can see two distinct yet closely related aspects. Firstly, there is our gradual, but permanent, transformation into the likeness of God's Son, in His character, and His thoughts and ways. This goes on every day of our lives, as we seek it. To possess our inheritance is to gain true Christ-likeness in the battle of life. Upon this transformation all future usefulness and ability to carry responsibility in His kingdom depends. Secondly, there is the present experience of His joy, peace, victory and sufficient grace. Caleb actually possessed his part of the Land. Paul actually proved the Lord in the most testing circumstances. Clearly, our daily experience of proving Him is closely connected with the transformation of our characters. Holding these two aspects in Scriptural balance we shall avoid two equal and opposite mistakes, either imagining that the land can be entered and enjoyed instantly and fully here and now, through some experience perhaps, (Deut. 7:22, 23 rules this out), or postponing any enjoyment of our inheritance till heaven. One example may help to illustrate the relationship of these two aspects. Take the great matter of patience. Over a life-time, we should become more patient (inherit His patience). But we may also, here and now, know the power of His patience

keeping us when we are provoked or kept waiting. As we prove Him in daily experience, His patient character will be formed in us.

As we said earlier, it was God's Plan that His people should learn certain lessons during the 2 year period in the wilderness and then, on the basis of these, enter the land. Because they failed to learn the lessons, they failed to enter the land. These give us a kind of ABC of the Christian life. We not only need to be clear on our foundations, but also to learn our ABC thoroughly. Once we know we are in God's school of salvation, we must become diligent learners. Much depends on this. Here then are five keys to spiritual progress:

1. They had to learn the meaning of the pillar of cloud and of fire, that God was ever present to govern them as His people (and so to guide, provide for, protect and give them victory), that He was in charge. So we must really learn the meaning of 'Jesus is Lord' and 'Head of His church', that He is ever present as King, in our lives and whenever we gather as His church. This simple, yet essential lesson is not easy to learn in practice. But how shall we enter into our inheritance if we insist on running our own lives without reference to Him, and gathering as His church as we think best?

2. They had to learn the meaning of the Passover and the Red Sea (that is, for us, the cross). They had some understanding of these, but note how much is said about the sacrifices at Sinai, and about the Cross in the New Testament. They had to learn that through the blood of the Passover lamb they were a redeemed people, and that in the Red Sea they became a baptised people; baptised into Moses and into one nation. So we must learn not only total dependence on the precious blood of Christ for our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, (Christ died for us), but also the meaning of our baptism, union with Christ in His death and resurrection, (we died with Christ), and also union with His people, baptised into one body. We have died to the old life, with all its ideas and ways, and begun to live as a new people under a new government. It is significant that the new generation which entered the land were given a constant reminder of their baptism in the Jordan, the 12 stones set up in the river and now under the waters, and the 12 stones set up nearby at Gilgal (Josh. 4:8-10). As a nation they had died and risen again. Failure to learn in experience the meaning of Gal. 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ," will certainly jeopardize entering into our inheritance.

3. They had to learn to trust the Lord for every need and for victory, when tested. When we see them singing on the banks of the Red Sea, we might imagine that after such an amazing deliverance they would never again doubt the Lord. Yet within a few days they were murmuring because there was no water, and then no food (Exodus 15 and 16). Could they not trust the Lord to provide after such an experience? Well, we know our own hearts. We may sing our heads off on Sunday, but what about Monday? Trusting the Lord in real life situations is an important key to spiritual progress, but it is not easy. No doubt some of the people were baffled and began to doubt when the cloud moved south to Sinai instead of north to the land. 'What is the Lord doing?', they may well have said. But the Lord had His reasons (Ex. 13:17 and 18). Then, a careful comparison of Num. 13:1 and Deut. 1:21, 22 shows that the idea of sending the spies came from the people; the Lord only permitted it. He knew that it was better for Israel not to see the fortified cities and the giants. God said, "Go up, take possession." They said, "Let us send men before us." If they had simply trusted the Lord, He would have led them to victory as He did 40 years later. But they had not learned to trust the Lord. Are we learning?

4. They had to learn (at Sinai) that the Lord had a will and detailed plan for their personal lives and their life together. Look at the details, covering every aspect from the ten commandments to the tabernacle,

and much more. So the Lord has a will concerning our whole lives, nothing is left for us to decide without reference to Him. His will is in His word, explicitly or in the form of signposts. If we want to gain our inheritance, we must be ruled by His Word. If we are content with reading a few verses a day, we shall certainly not make it; "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." How shall we do His will, if we don't know it; and how shall we know it, if we don't make time to discover it?

5. They had to learn that they were to be an ordered people, not a crowd of individuals but, a holy nation ... a kingdom of worshipping priests ... a people belonging to God. Look at the tribes encamped around the tabernacle according to God's plan, or on the march, each tribe in its appointed place. So it is with Christ and His church. The church is an ordered organism functioning under its Head. We must learn to let go our self-centred individualism and play our God appointed part in His family and kingdom. (To illustrate: personal guidance should be tested in fellowship; otherwise, we run the risk of becoming spiritual tramps, wandering in the wilderness.) And if we think that our life together as His church, and how we gather, is a matter of opinion, we should remind ourselves of Korah who rejected God's order for His people (Numbers 16). In this tragic story, recorded for our instruction, profound principles are revealed. The Lord has not left it to us to build His church according to our own ideas. "I will build My church."

These then are the five basic lessons we must be learning if we are to make spiritual progress. The more thoroughly we learn them, the more progress we shall make. Remember, we are thinking of spiritual principles, not definite stages in our lives. Learning and 'entering' are continuous and go hand in hand. The measure of our co-operation with the Lord will be the measure of our transformation into His likeness and therefore usefulness to Him. We may miss God's purpose in our salvation, our inheritance, wholly or in part.

It is tragic, of course, that many Christians have a bad beginning, because of an inadequate presentation (and therefore understanding) of the Gospel. This leads to many problems and is a major handicap. But it is possible to have a good beginning, a strong and healthy new birth, and still miss the goal. Israel had a great beginning in its deliverance from Egypt. Spiritual growth and progress is not automatic nor guaranteed.

Before drawing to a close, we must just mention two matters which will repay further consideration.

(i) The ways in which the land itself is described. In Exodus 3:8, it is called, "a good and spacious land ... flowing with milk and honey." The latter description comes about 20 times; clearly a picture of abundance. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly." In Deut. 8:7-10, we have the fullest description of this land of plenty: "Fountains and springs ... wheat and barley ... vines ... bread without scarcity ... iron and copper ... a land in which you will lack nothing." John says, "From the abundance of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." In Hebrews 3 and 4 the land is called "God's rest." As God rested on the seventh day from all His creative work, so He has completed His redemptive work in His Son, and is now at rest. We live now in the outworking of His complete victory. It is for us to enter into all that He has done. These Hebrew Christians were in danger of failing to do this. Jesus said, "Come to Me ... and I will give you rest ... you will find rest for your souls."

(ii) The differences between life in the land and life in the wilderness. These give us some marks of maturity. For example: the manna ceased, because the people could (and were expected to) live off the land, and there was no need, in such a land, to provide bread from heaven (Joshua 5:11, 12). This means

that when the special interventions of the Lord are not needed, they are withdrawn. Dependence on evidences indicates immaturity. In the land we are called to depend on the Lord Himself without constant signs of His care. "For He has said, I will never fail you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Finally, let us focus on Caleb's possession of his part of the land, and the far-reaching results of his wholeheartedness.

As we read Joshua (and early Judges), it soon becomes clear that of the new generation who crossed the Jordan (which consisted of: those who came out of Egypt and were under 20 at Kadesh; Caleb and Joshua (and the loyal tribe of Levi, Ex. 32); those born in the wilderness), only a minority fully possessed their portion of the land. Sadly, the lessons of the wilderness were only partially learnt. While the power of the enemy was broken in the three great campaigns (lasting about 7 years), when the land was divided among the tribes, their actual possession of it varied from tribe to tribe. The enemy was not thoroughly driven out. That is why we find, for example, the Philistines still in the land in the time of David. This sad fact serves to underline our need of constant deliverance from our unbelieving and disobedient hearts (Num. 33:50-56).

But Caleb (and the minority) had a different spirit. He had come out of Egypt, passed through the Red Sea, had been at Sinai, and wanted to go up and possess the land at the age of 40, but had to endure the 38 wasted years through no fault of his. (Note: we cannot walk out on the people of God and possess the land on our own.) He had crossed the Jordan, marched round Jericho and taken part in the conquest. Now, at 85, he was one of those entrusted with the division of the land among the tribes. It is men like Caleb who are given spiritual responsibility by the Lord, for they can carry it. Caleb himself received Hebron as he had been promised. It was still inhabited by the giant Anakim. He drove them out! He was one who fully possessed his inheritance.

Why was Caleb's heart so set on Hebron? Surely because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had lived there, and were buried there in the cave of the field of Machpelah. This was the only part of the land which they actually owned in their life-time (apart from Jacob's bit of land in Shechem). "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (Heb. 11:13). Caleb was determined to enter into the promises made to them, and to him.

Then, note Caleb's influence on others. What an influence he must have had on the next generation during the 38 years. And Othniel, his nephew and son-in-law, captured Kiriath-Sepher (SW of Hebron), and later became the first of the judges raised up by the Lord to save Israel. The influence of the wholehearted for God is always incalculable. (See Josh. 15:13-19, Judges 3:7-11.)

Note again how Hebron (captured by Caleb) was given to the Levites and became one of the six cities of refuge. Caleb's personal inheritance was the surrounding hill-country. So we see how many were enriched, provided for and given refuge through this great-hearted man (Josh. 21:8-13). Finally, we recall how Hebron was the place where David was first crowned King (2 Sam. 2:4). So Caleb contributed directly to David's kingdom and so to the Coming of 'great David's greater Son'. If Caleb had lived in David's time he would certainly have been among David's mighty men (1 Chron. 11:10).

In conclusion, it is helpful to note the close relationship throughout between Joshua and Caleb. In many ways Joshua points us to the Holy Spirit and His commission to bring us into our inheritance in Christ (just as Moses points to Christ our deliverer). It is impressive how, on the eve of the battle for Jericho (the key to the conquest), the Lord appears to and takes command of Joshua (5:13-15). He is the invisible Commander-in-Chief thereafter. So the ascended Lord Jesus, through His Spirit, is now in charge of His

church. Remember, as we enter the land the power of the enemy has already been broken at the Cross and we have an invisible, yet all-powerful Commander to lead us in. Only a 'Caleb spirit' is needed on our part. As Joshua and Caleb fought side by side, so our wholehearted co-operation with the Lord is essential. May we all be among those who, like Caleb, follow the Lord wholeheartedly.

Bible references: Matt.4:4; 11:28, 29; 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27; John 1:16; 10:10; Rom. 5:8; 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 5:7; 12:13; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 2:12, 13; Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:9; Gen. 23:17-20; 33:18-20; Exod. 12:38; 13:21, 22; 19:5, 6; Num. 13 and 14; 34:16-19; Deut. 1:8; 7:6; 8:1-20; Josh. 1:3

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