

## ***Caleb and Joshua – Bound Together by Minority Conviction***

Senator John F. Kennedy was in bed recovering from back surgery when he wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning book titled Profiles in Courage. In this book he profiled eight men whom he considered to be courageous leaders in the difficult arena of politics. Some of them are familiar names to us in American history: John Quincy Adams, Sam Houston, and Daniel Webster. But among the eight he included a comparatively obscure freshman senator from Kansas named Edmond G. Ross. Some would say that the courage of Edmond Ross single handedly saved the constitutional form of government of the United States.

The story is set in the tumultuous years following the Civil War. An assassin's bullet not only took the life of the president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, but also elevated the vice president from Tennessee, Andrew Johnson, to the White House. Johnson was committed to continuing Lincoln's policies of reconciliation and restoration toward the South, but Congress greatly disagreed with him. The House of Representatives voted articles of impeachment to remove him as president. It was probably one of the greatest constitutional crises of our country. The actual trial took place in May of 1868 in the chambers of the United States' Senate with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as the presiding judge. Two-thirds majority was necessary to convict, thirty-six votes. Thirty-five had declared for conviction, 18 had declared against conviction, and everything hung on one undeclared vote, that of the freshman senator from Kansas. There was no doubt that the people of Kansas wanted Johnson out, and Ross was pledged to represent them. The position of his Republican party was for conviction as well.

On May 16, 1868 the Senate Chambers became absolutely silent as the Chief Justice called for Edmond Ross's vote. With great courage, Ross clearly and loudly announced, "NOT GUILTY!" Some historians say that with those words he preserved the constitutional form of government, but also with those words he ended his political career. His family was ostracized. He was reduced to virtual poverty and lived in obscurity for the rest of his life, all because of courage.

Two Hebrew friends we read about in the scriptures, Caleb and Joshua, performed another great act of courage centuries earlier. "Caleb" is a Hebrew word that means "dog," and you have to wonder why any parent would ever name a son "dog."

I come from a family with lots of men named Charles. My grandfather was Charles, my father is Charles, my father-in-law is Charles, my brother-in-law is Charles, my nephew is Charles, my great-nephew is Charles, and my wife is Charleen. My father was a pastor and when I was a boy, in one of those fleeting moments when my attention was caught by something he was saying in one of his sermons, he said that he didn't like his name. He wished he had not been named Charles. But I think what especially caught my attention was when he showed some emotion and said, "I wouldn't even name a dog Charles." My middle name is Charles. Now I've got to tell you, I don't fully understand why Caleb's father, Jephunneh, named him "dog" any more than

I understand why my father named me Charles.

Caleb's friend was Joshua. In Hebrew, the pronunciation is Joshua and in Greek, the pronunciation is Jesus. It means, "the Lord is deliverance."

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I cannot think of a greater compliment to be paid to any man than that God would choose to name his Son after him.

Caleb and Joshua were friends because they were bound together by a minority conviction. To understand the setting for their story, we must go back to one of Israel's great days of decision.

After four centuries of enslavement and captivity, the Hebrew people were set free from the land of Egypt and the ruthless rule of Pharaoh by God's miraculous intervention. God not only delivered them out of a difficult place but also promised them the Land of Canaan, the Promised Land. God said that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a place where vineyards had already been planted and established and the cities were already built. It was a wonderful, marvelous, and extraordinary gift from God.

Comparatively quickly more than a million people walked out of captivity in Egypt, across the Sinai Peninsula, eventually stopping at a place called

Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin. There they were on the brink of entering their promised land, but they were filled with a mixture of fear and faith.

Let there be no doubt that they wanted to live in this promised paradise. Let there be no doubt that they would prefer the prosperity of Palestine to the difficulties of the desert. But there were problems. The Promised Land was inhabited by other people and protected by experienced armies. The Hebrew people were unarmed, inexperienced in warfare. Some thought it was better to return to the security of slavery in Egypt than risk slaughter in the battles for Palestine. It's true that God had promised to go with them to fight their battles and to give them the land, but did they have the faith for that? Did they have the faith to really believe that God would give to them that which he had promised?

I think how typical it is with our lives. We are anxious to escape our slaveries and claim God's promises. But when it gets right down to the faith and obedience necessary to make the promises come true we can become very frightened. Most of us can point to a past or a present experience, and the rest are probably destined to a future experience of some type of slavery from which we would yearn to escape. And then, by God's sovereign intervention and by an initial burst of faith on our part, we will escape and make it through some difficult desert and be on the brink of our promised land, only to discover that there are enemies to be fought and that faith is not a single burst but an ongoing relationship and trust in God. And then what will we do? Most of us wonder if it wouldn't just be easier to go back. As much as we hated the slavery that we left, and as painful as it was, at least it was secure.

For one guy it is leaving the slavery of drug abuse or alcohol addiction. For somebody else it's getting out of a sinful and destructive relationship. For another it's the bondage of a whole lifestyle of bad habits. God promises us something far more and something far better and so we stumble out of those slaveries in faith, only to be overwhelmed with a new fear. We look back and see pain, but also familiarity and security. We look ahead to a Promised Land but aren't sure we really have the faith to believe God and the stamina to obey God.

I think we understand Israel's day of decision because we've been there. We know what it's like when fear faces faith and we must decide what to do and which way to go.

It was one of the most important decisions in Israel's history and so God gave them encouragement.

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, chapter 13, verse 1, God instructs them, "*Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites.*" Some have mistakenly referred to them as spies. I think God would prefer that they be described as scouts. A dozen men were to go and see what it was like and bring back a report of what God was giving them.

Twelve men were chosen, one from each of the tribal groups. For forty days in late July and through August they traveled the land – astonished to see their future home. Among those twelve were Caleb representing his tribe of Judah and Joshua representing his tribe of Ephraim. They came among other places to the Valley of Eshcol where there were extraordinary vineyards. In fact, they took a knife and cut down a cluster of grapes that was so large that they carried them back on a pole between two men. If you visit the land of Israel today, on almost every taxi cab and tour bus, as the logo of the state tourist agency, you will see the silhouette of two men with a pole between them supporting a cluster of grapes. If you asked your tour guide what that's all about, it will be explained to you that Caleb and Joshua were the first tourists that ever came to the land of Israel.

At the end of their 40 days, these 12 tourists returned to Kadesh and gave their report. All twelve agreed on the facts. It was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey. It was beautiful. There were bees to provide the honey so that you could simply go and take it. There was enough livestock to produce milk to feed a nation of a million or more people. There were cities throughout the country with houses and walls, well-built and strong, wonderful, waiting for the Hebrew people to inhabit them. And there were people, lots of people. There were Jebusites, for they had built the city of Salem, later to be known as Jerusalem. There were Canaanites along the coast. There were Hittites who had migrated from up north near the modern land of Turkey. And there were the descendants of Anak, meaning that they were like giants. Anak was so tall and so strong that his very name struck fear in the hearts of his own generation, but his descendants after him were just as large. And so everybody was afraid of the sons of Anak.

They all agreed on the facts of the report. But there was great disagreement on the interpretation and what ought to be Israel's response. There were ten who saw the problems and there were two who saw the potential.

The ten gave a majority report. They said it couldn't be done — the enemy was too numerous.

They said, “We are like grasshoppers compared to them. We are so little and they are so large; they are so strong and we are so weak. They are so experienced and we are so inexperienced. There is no possible way that we could ever claim this land that God has promised to us.”

It wasn’t just a recommendation they gave, but they also spread the gossip. Each one returned to his own tribal area at a time when there was growing tribal identity, and they spread rumors until the report was actually exaggerated and the masses of people formed a consensus, “It, indeed, cannot be done.”

Ten men influenced a nation to the point that corporately they decided they were better off in slavery in Egypt than in the Promised Land. They actually discussed selecting a leader other than Moses to lead them back across the wilderness of Zin and into slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt. Ten men convinced a nation not to trust God, men whose names I would consider to be remarkably forgettable: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Goddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sathur, Nahbi, and Geuel. You wouldn’t choose to name your child after one of them — not even your dog!

Ten men got their wish. They had seen the Promised Land, but they never set foot in it again. They died in the desert. That’s tragic enough, except they took another million people into the grave with them. For the entire generation over the age of 20, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, died in that same desert and were buried there as well.

For the minority, there were two men. Two faithful men of courage gave their report in Numbers 13:30. Caleb spoke for them saying, “*We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.*”

Joshua and Caleb focused on the promises of God and not on the problems that surrounded them. They were not so much frightened by the giants who were greater than they as they were faithful to the God who was greater than the giants. Caleb and Joshua were convinced that they could fight and win any battle with God’s help. Not that their stand was easy! It wasn’t easy or simple for them. It came at a very great price. They were not fools. They knew that the giants were giants. They had seen them. They knew that the cities appeared to be impregnable. They knew that the armies, humanly speaking, were unconquer-

able. They knew that the vast majority of the people around them had already decided against them and that minority opinions at best were rarely popular. It took great courage to say what they said and to do what they did.

As a result, these two men were bound together in a friendship based upon conviction. Without that shared conviction, in all probability, they would not otherwise have been friends. They were from different tribes and might not even have ever met. Caleb was comparatively obscure while Joshua was very well known as Moses’ assistant. But they were bound together in faithfulness to God and in the opposition that came from others.

I think to myself that such can be the strongest glue in relationships. When you and another are the only ones in your company who are doing right, the only ones at your school to stand for Jesus Christ, the only individuals in your family or neighborhood who have faith, it can glue you together like Caleb and Joshua. You find that when 99 percent of the

community or the company or the church is against you, the remaining one percent can form a bond and a friendship that can last for a lifetime. It makes it valuable to consider the dynamics

that led Caleb and Joshua into their friendship and into making the decent decisions they made.

To start it off, there was the presence of conviction before they had their crisis. These courageous men were convinced for God before they ever faced the crisis decision. In Joshua 14:14 we are told that Caleb “*followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.*” He had a faith and a commitment in God and a conviction to do right before the pressure ever was on and that is precisely why he was able to make the decent decisions that he did.

The same goes for us. The decision not to have premarital sexual intercourse is rarely made at the registration desk of a motel or on the couch in a dimly light room. The decision is made on moral conviction before the moment of passion. The decision to “just say no,” whether it be snorting cocaine, smoking crack or popping pills, is rarely made at a party where everyone else is doing it. The decision not to cheat on an expense report or on an examination at school is rarely made when paper and pencil is in front of you and the pressure is on. These decisions are made with convictions that are established long

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in advance.

So it was for Caleb and so it is for us. When conviction precedes crisis, it is then, and often then alone, that we are able to make the decent and courageous decisions for what is right and for what is Godly.

Caleb and Joshua not only had conviction before their crisis, they were set on pleasing God rather than yielding to peer pressure. We all know that peer pressure is one of life's primary causes of human behavior. It is extraordinarily powerful. If you want to see it, observe any high school campus, visit any bar in America, or get to know any church. You will find that whenever we are part of a social grouping, peer pressure has a great deal to do with what we think, how we speak, our political, religious and personal attitudes. Peer pressure can be good — like a huge tidal wave that sweeps us along to righteousness and justice. But it can also take us straight to hell.

It is a very difficult thing to stand up against peer pressure. Those men, Caleb and Joshua, did it. They made decent decisions because their primary motivation in life was not to be pressured by peers, but to please God. I don't pretend that it's easy — I'm as susceptible to peer pressure as anyone else. It takes courage and conviction and commitment to do what God wants when everyone else disagrees. It's very hard to take a stand when other people actually laugh at you. It can be humiliating. It can be embarrassing. The cost can be exceedingly high — you might lose your job or a promotion or a place in graduate school or a relationship in a family. In the case of Caleb and Joshua it was life threatening. The people of Israel picked up rocks so that they could stone them to death because of the positions they took against the pressure of their peers.

Then add to our understanding of the dynamic of their friendship and the decent decisions they made, the connection of courage. I think that courage had a lot to do with what Joshua and Caleb did. Now, as already mentioned, Caleb was comparatively obscure, at least in comparison to Joshua. A whole book of the Bible is named after Joshua. By the time this story takes place, Joshua was the assistant to Moses, so everyone in Israel knew his name and knew who he was. He was a man who met Moses half way on top of the mountain after Moses talked with God. He was a man who, when Moses was not chosen to lead the people into eventual conquest of the Promised Land, was chosen in Moses' place. He goes down in history as a great general, as a man of God, as a good

politician, and as a military strategist. He was quite a man.

But Caleb was first in courage. On the day of decision it was Caleb who spoke. He was the one who led, the courageous one. Now I'm not necessarily saying that had there been no Caleb that Joshua would have crumbled and voted with the other ten to be part of the majority report, but I can't help but wonder. My clear impression is that when Joshua connected to Caleb's courage, he became courageous too.

So it often is. It's hard to stand alone, but when there is one other person with whom you can join hands, one other person of conviction and strength, you find that your own courage, faith, and strength rises to meet the level of the Caleb who is near you. Likewise, when you are the Caleb who once stood alone, your courage is bolstered and sustained by the Joshua who comes and stands by your side.

If you are a Caleb, be courageous and give your courage to others. If you are a Joshua, find a Caleb to be your friend. And then be bound together in a friendship, a courageous friendship, of conviction.

I close with the final paragraph from John Kennedy's Profiles in Courage,

*To be courageous, these stories make clear, requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place, and circumstance. It is an opportunity that sooner or later is presented to us all . . . The stories of past courage can define that ingredient — they can teach, they can offer hope, they can provide inspiration. But they cannot supply courage itself. For this each man must look into his own soul.*

My friends, be a Caleb. Be a Joshua. Not that their story or anything that I have said can make you courageous, but look into your own soul and there find your faith in Jesus Christ to make you courageous for him.

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