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A ROLLING STONE GATHERS BRUISES!

Today's Text: Joshua 14: 1-15

Extracts:

“Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal; and Caleb the son of Jephuneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee...saying, surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thy inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day how the Anakims were there...; if so the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said. And Joshua blessed him and gave unto Caleb...Hebron for inheritance” [Josh. 14: 6,9,12-13]

One of my primary school teachers used to tell the class a story about St. Augustine of Hippo (North Africa). I don't know whether he made it up because I have not yet found the story in the writings that I have read on the great church scholar of the 4th Century A.D. According to the story, Augustine was a brilliant academic who was anxious to understand the doctrine of the Trinity, as a basis for accepting Christianity. For a great number of years, he struggled with the subject. The more he tried to understand, the more confused he became. One day, he sat by the seashore while he was reading the Bible. Then, his attention was drawn to a young man who dug a shallow pit by the seashore and was using a small container to fetch water from the sea to pour into the pit. After the young man had done several trips, Augustine became curious. He asked the young man what he was doing. He replied that he wanted to empty all the water in the sea into that pit! Augustine reportedly exclaimed, “Young man, you are wasting your time!” The young man retorted, “So are you!” Immediately, Augustine gave up his fruitless search and accepted what the Bible had said about the Trinity. He went on to become the Bishop of Hippo and one of the leading lights of the early Christian church.

In many respects, we are like St. Augustine. We are restless and looking for success or achievement in school, work, career, profession, business, marriage or ministry. Wherever we stand appears inferior to everywhere else. In other words, we think that the grass is greener ahead of us. In the process, we stress and bruise ourselves. Have we left our vision (revelation) behind while pursuing a mirage (an optical illusion) ahead? When are we going to settle down?

In today's lesson, we shall use Caleb's story to obtain some insights into how we can settle down in peace to pursue our various life-goals.

1. Caleb settles down

Caleb came from the tribe of Judah. At the age of forty, he was one of the twelve spies sent by Moses to find out about the Promised Land [**Josh. 14: 7**]. Only Joshua and Caleb brought back a faith-filled report, that in spite of the fact that there were giants in the land, the Anakims, that the children of Israel would take the land because God had already promised it to them. For demonstrating such faith, God swore that only Caleb and Joshua would enter the Promised Land from among the unbelieving generation [**Num. 14: 23-24**].

The children of Israel had now reached the Promised Land. They had conquered a large part of it, which had been allocated to other tribes, such as those of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh [**Josh. 13: 15-33**]. Caleb was now 85 years old and yet he had not received anything [**Josh. 14: 10**]. If we were in his place, we would be angry and organize rebellion and intrigue against Joshua. It might not have meant anything to us that Joshua had at the time given himself nothing. In fact, he was the *last* to be rewarded for “when they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave inheritance to Joshua” [**Josh. 19: 49-50**].

Caleb went to Joshua to say that he was now ready to settle down to his own inheritance. However, he did not ask for Jericho or Ai. Instead, he asked for unconquered territory, the land of the giants, the Anakims [**Josh. 14: 12**]. In other words, at the point that he chose to have an inheritance, that is, to settle down, his hardship days were far from over! To take over the land of giants would not be easy street. He was asking for a mountain that would not be the easiest place to take or live in.

What would we do if we were in his place? A young man or woman called by God into the ministry would pretend not to have heard! They would rather make a huge success of their present endeavours and retire before answering the call of the Lord. But when is the right time? How many young men or women want to settle down to love and marriage when they are still pursuing their careers? But when is the appropriate time? How many career parents are interested in bearing children, even when they may have several dogs and cats? But when is the convenient time? Therefore, we all have a great deal to learn from Caleb.

2. Lessons from Caleb’s story

Why was Caleb able to accept the desire to settle down even when there was as yet nothing to settle down on? Here are some of the factors:

a) *Fear of the Lord*

From Caleb’s short address to Joshua, we can easily see how much he feared God. Speaking about the journey of the 12 spies sent by Moses and

the report that they brought back, Caleb said, “my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt *but I wholly followed the Lord my God*” [**Josh. 14: 8**]. He gave glory to God for his long and healthy life [**v. 10**] and believed that he could defeat the Anakims “if so be the Lord will be with me” [**v. 12**]. Therefore, God was his strength and source of supply.

b) *Steadfastness*

One thing is to fear God, but it is another thing to be able to do so *all the time*. Caleb told Joshua, “And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as He said, *these forty and five years*, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old” [**v. 10**]. That is a good example of steadfastness. How many of us can remain steadfast after a few months or years without grumbling? Only those who wait for the Lord with fear, worship and thanks can run without being tired or walk without fainting [**Is. 40: 31**].

c) *Selflessness*

Going by human standards, we would have expected Caleb and Joshua to be rewarded first before anybody else, given God’s promise to them 45 years earlier. However, they were among the *last*, after they had helped others to obtain their inheritance [**see Josh., Ch. 13**]. God always rewards selflessness. In the words of Jesus Christ, “If you have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” [**Lk 16: 12**].

d) *Blessing of strength*

Caleb relied on God for him to defeat the Anakims and take over their fenced cities [**Josh. 14: 12**]. In deed, God’s grace is sufficient for us because His strength is made perfect in our weaknesses [**2 Cor. 12: 9**]. With God, nothing is impossible [**Lk 1: 37**]. He can turn our “fear ways” into freeways!

e) *Blessing of location*

Caleb inherited Hebron [**Josh. 14: 14-15**]. This is significant. First, Abram [**Gen. 13:18**], Isaac and Jacob [**Gen. 35: 27**] had been there. Hebron would become David’s first capital after he became king [**2 Sam. 2: 1-3**]. Therefore, Caleb inherited choice property! When we also choose to settle down in accordance with God’s plan, our location is choice property.

3. Let us go and do likewise!

Let us explore how we can apply the above lessons to our own situations. The following areas should be noted:

a) *Family*

Let us make a very important point here. *Marriage is not compulsory.* Jesus underlined this point when He said:

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it [Matt. 19: 12]

Those who have chosen to marry do find themselves under pressure. For example, those who are not yet married are anxious to get in while some of those who are already in may be anxious to get out! There is the story of a young bride who always threatened to leave each time she had the slightest misunderstanding with her husband. Each of such times, her husband would plead with and pamper her. She did it so often that her husband became fed up. One day, she packed again, as usual but this time her husband said nothing. As she turned to her husband to inform him that she was leaving, he stood up, went towards the wardrobe, brought out a nightdress and said, "you forgot this one!" That was the last time she ever threatened to leave. There and then, she decided to settle down.

Pressures of modern living will put enormous pressures on marital relations. Who will do the cleaning or cooking? Can we afford to have children at this time? How can we make love when I am too tired? What do you care how I am doing on my job or business? Sooner than later, however, you have to do something about the problems before they deal with you! *In a happy marriage, there are no rights and privileges, only responsibilities.* Once both husband and wife come to appreciate that, then they are ready to settle down.

A related issue is the relationship between children and their parents. As children grow into teenagers and adults, there are pressures, some pulling, others pushing. The children want freedom from parental control; yet, they expect parents to pay their school fees and pick up their mess. For parents, children remain children even when they (children) are 50 years old! Sooner than later, parents have to let go and give the children room to make mistakes and learn from them. The father of the Prodigal Son knew that his son was suffering after he had squandered his inheritance on "riotous living." It was only after the young man had rediscovered himself and returned home that his father ran forward to receive him [Lk 15: 11-24].

Some young people have found themselves (or chosen to remain) unmarried. Some have become single parents by chance or by choice. Others are still searching for their “soul mates.” In whatever circumstances you find yourself, do not fret. Always remember that God will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on Him because they trust in Him [**Is. 26: 3-4**]. Become the bride of Jesus “for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; *for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*” [**Rev. 19: 7-8**]. The alternative is to go by the way of the world, keep pursuing the elusive and get bruised over and over. God forbid!

b) *Career pursuits*

We have a pressing decision to make: career before God or career with Him? For many of us, career comes first. We work extremely hard to get a good education and a good job, make a couple of investments and save for the rainy day. To some extent, this is a healthy pursuit. The only problem is that the road to success is *always under construction!* A millionaire wants to become a billionaire. There is always somebody ahead of us that we consider more successful than we are. Even when we now get materially successful, what do we do with it? Waste it on “riotous living” like the Prodigal Son, or give it to the state as taxes? Therefore, all we may succeed in doing is bruising ourselves!

An alternative approach is to strive for balance where God is at the centre of your life, where He directs your path, where your material blessings are for His glory [**Matt. 6: 33**]. Then, you will have built your house on the rock of God, and no matter the winds or rains that come your way, your career, profession or business will remain strong, unshaken and unshakable [**Matt. 7: 24-27**].

c) *Place of worship*

Many of us are still trying to determine where we can call our place of worship. We go by popularity, running to denominations or congregations that seem to grab the headlines of the day or period. At that rate, we may never settle down. If you examine the seven churches discussed in the book of Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3, there was not a single one of them without any blemish. Happily, we do not go to heaven by denominations but as individuals!

Samuel was raised in the home of Eli the priest, whose sons “lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” [**1 Sam. 2: 22**]. Yet, it did not stop him from becoming a powerful prophet of God. When the apostle John asked Jesus, “Master, we saw one casting

out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbad him because he followeth not us,” Jesus replied, “Forbid him not: for *there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is on our part*” [Mk 9: 38-39]. Since we did not choose God [just as it is not the criminal who finds the police but the other way round!], He alone determines where He wants us to *fruitfully* worship and serve Him. Therefore, we should stop running around and settle down to our calling.

4. Conclusion

We may think that we have time but we don't. The choice is clear. We either go God's way or we should stop pretending that we do. Going God's way means relying on His guidance in *everything we do*, like Caleb. So, the day God tells (or leads) us to settle down in love, marriage, career or ministry, we should accept it with joy and obey Him *right away*. However, should we choose to keep running around for a “better deal,” we are on our own. According to a popular saying, a rolling stone gathers no moss. However, it gathers bruises!