

Wholehearted discipleship

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Dr G.N.M.Collins

[0 : 00] We will now turn with me to our second reading, the reading from the book of Joshua, chapter 14. And verse 8.

Words that were spoken by Caleb, as you remember, as you recall what had happened at Kadesh Barnea 40 years previously. Nevertheless, it is my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt.

That I wholly followed the Lord my God. I wholly followed the Lord my God. It's hardly necessary to say at the outset that these words were not spoken by Caleb in self-conceit.

They form a simple testimony to the faithfulness of God. The speaker was now a very old man, a veteran of many battles, but he has not yet put off his armor.

Indeed, he is actually preparing for the biggest fight of his life. Forty years before, as we read in Numbers, he had been given the promise, along with Joshua, of entering the land of promise and of taking possession there.

[1 : 21] When those who had faint-heartedly turned back from the challenge of the situation at Kadesh Barnea had all died in the wilderness.

He was now a man of 85 years of age. far beyond the age limit of military service. But he was not yet on the retired list.

The occupant of a chimney corner or its equivalent, fighting again his battles, rejoicing in his victories, speaking at every opportunity of old and happy far-off things and of battles long ago.

He had come to his commander-in-chief and his companion on that occasion in Kadesh Barnea, Joshua, to request that he be entrusted with the task of attacking and subduing the greatest stronghold in the vicinity, the strongly fortified city of Hebron.

to fight what he knew was to be the toughest of all his battles. And lest anyone should think that he was incapable of the task, a task that was so exacting, he declares, I am as strong this day as I was on that day in Kadesh Barnea when the Lord gave me that promise.

[3 : 02] The Lord had not failed him, that's what he's emphasizing. All the faculties that he had 40 years previously, he still had them.

Those years were years that normally are marked with increasing infirmities and failing strength.

But not in his case. I am as strong this day, he says, as I was then. And he has in the slightest doubt whether he will succeed in this tremendous venture if he gets the permission that he seeks.

If so be, the Lord will be with me. I shall be able, he says, to drive them out. God had promised this and he was still taking God at his word after the lapse of all these years.

The very fact that he still had his strength unimpaired despite his ripe old age was to him an impressive indication of God's faithfulness to his word.

[4 : 24] And now he declares that he is ready to do his part. Ready to use the strength that God had continued to him to God's glory.

Speak the word, he says to Joshua, give me this mountain and I will do the rest. Now the theme that comes out of, comes to us out of such a passage as this is obviously wholehearted discipleship.

And in considering it tonight let us notice first of all the character by which it is known. And secondly, the challenge by which it is confronted. And lastly, the reward by which it is crowned.

First then, wholehearted discipleship, the character by which it is known. I wholly followed the Lord my God.

And that is surely the distinctive thing about true discipleship. There is a discipleship that is scarcely worthy of the name.

[5 : 41] It's temporary. It's divided. It's irresolute. It's half-hearted. Caleb's was of a very different order.

I wholly followed the Lord my God. But what does he mean? By wholly following the Lord his God. Well, first of all, he obviously means this.

That he acknowledges no other God but the living and true God. The God of Israel. To follow that God was an act of personal choice.

Men are not dragged into the service of God. Men are not pressed ganged into discipleship. Thy people shall be willing, says the psalmist, in the day of thy power.

And for himself he indicates his choice. Thou my sure portion art alone whom I did choose, O Lord. Man, after all, is made to serve.

[6 : 53] He has no choice in that matter. But he does have one choice and a very important one. The choice of the master whom he is to serve.

And there are only two. In the ultimate analysis, only two.

two. And the two are so completely opposed to each other that we have to choose between them. There can be no such thing as joint service of these two masters so diametrically opposed to each other in every respect.

Now that is what lies behind the exhortation given by Joshua himself to the people of Israel at Shechem when he was about to be separated from.

Choose ye this day whom ye will serve. It was the choice that Elijah gave to Israel in the days of Ahab when the people were summoned to Mount Carmel you remember to put God and Baal to the test.

[8 : 15] How long halt ye between two opinions if the Lord be God follow him but if Baal then follow him. It's the choice that Christ himself sets before us where he says no man can serve two masters.

and especially the two masters whom he designates as God and Mamma. So to follow the Lord fully means first of all to follow him only.

Again following the Lord fully surely means also to follow without reserve. to follow him with a loving heart and always.

Most people I dare say feel their need of religion at one time or another and many are attracted to certain aspects of Christianity. The rich young ruler you remember in the New Testament story was ready to follow the Lord partially if only the Lord would spare him the cross and the self-denial which he had mentioned he would have been an enthusiastic disciple or at least so he thought.

And there are many like him. They are quite prepared to associate themselves with the cause of Christ if Christ will compromise with them in certain matters.

[9 : 54] But there is nothing under the sun more utterly uncompromising than the gospel. Partial obedience to its demands is equated with disobedience.

king king Saul learned that lesson to his bitter disappointment.

On that occasion you remember when the Lord sent him to destroy Amalek the flocks and herds and everything that bore the brand of Amalek it was an accursed nation it must be wiped out from under heaven.

And Saul rendered partial obedience. Oh he had no compunction about slaying Amalekites but when it came to the flocks and herds of the Amalekites it was a different matter altogether.

You couldn't enrich yourself with Amalekites but you could with their flocks and herds. So he spared the best of the flocks and of the herds. And when he heard that Samuel had come he would out to meet him.

[11 : 15] Looking for the prophet's approval and saying before the prophet had time to ask him as to the measure of his obedience. Blessed be thou of the Lord I have performed the word of the Lord. But then said Samuel meaneth the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen that I hear.

You are commanded to slay all the flocks and the herds of the Amalekites. Dead sheep don't bleat. Dead oxen don't low. They're giving you away.

They're testifying against you. And when Saul went on to excuse himself for what he had done by saying that he had done it from good and proper religious motives. That he wanted to sacrifice these good animals unto the Lord.

Samuel would have none of it. to obey is better than sacrifice and his instructions had been perfectly clear to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of lambs.

He was not rewarded for the measure of obedience which he had rendered. His action was judged as disobedience to the word of the Lord and he suffered in consequence.

[12 : 44] There are others who are prepared like Dunnyon's Mr. By-ends to become disciples upon certain conditions and to maintain their discipleship while those conditions last.

You remember Mr. By-ends that fastidious man who was found in the way of the pilgrims for a time when the true pilgrims asked him as to his persuasion and the city of his origin and the people from whom he sprang well he told them and there were certain things in his religion he said that they were always most careful about and one was never to strive against wind and tide never do that be compliant go with the stream and the other was to be most zealous for religion when he walked abroad in his silver slippers and when they praised him in the streets oh yes in those conditions you get many disciples of a kind but not of the kind represented by

Caleb the one criterion by which these so called disciples judge religion is not is it of God but is it of men is it popular again to follow the Lord fully surely means to follow him openly many seem to have the idea of stealing into heaven almost unobserved entering by some unrequented path as if they were afraid of being seen in the way of the true disciple Peter

Peter followed his master to the high priest's palace yes but in that part of his pilgrimage he certainly was not following the Lord fully for he was not following him openly he stood among the Lord's enemies warning himself at their fire and ended up by denying all connection with the Jesus of Nazareth who was at the center of all this excitement Nicodemus was a disciple and a true one but for a long time he did not follow the Lord fully came to the Lord by night you remember to begin with and he sat there in the Sanhedrin amongst those who were unfriendly to Christ scarcely venturing an opinion in favor of Christ until he could no longer help it he didn't come out openly actually until the crucifixion of Christ now it's perfectly true that we're not expected to proclaim our religion from the housetops and to call attention to ourselves to send a trumpeter before us like the

Pharisees when they did their alms to pray at the street corners to be seen and heard of men that's one extreme that we must avoid and the other extreme also men do not light a candle said Jesus and put it under a bushel serve no purpose there its purpose is to give light to all that are in the house secret discipleship is genuine discipleship but it is not the kind of discipleship represented by Caleb who followed the Lord fully all that he wants of us is our sincere public profession in every way possible of his holy name he shall be witnesses unto me and in giving him that deserved witness we shall be coming up to the expectation which he expresses he says so let your light let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works or not for your own glory but for the glory of your father who is in heaven that's the character by which full discipleship is known now let's think of the challenge by which it is confronted to follow the Lord fully will undoubtedly bring us into challenging situations as Caleb learned in personal experience because it will mean this that we shall have to continue to follow when others and many of them turn away and forsake him that's what it meant to Caleb go back if you will to that story in numbers where the spies were sent to spy out the land for the hosts of Israel when the spies came back they were unanimous up to a point they agreed that the land answered to the description that God had given them of it but then they fell apart they differed us to the prospects of conquest ten of them said the land is everything that we've heard of it but all the difficulties of conquest are so tremendous that we cannot possibly face them it would be sheer madness they said to go up against the inhabitants of the land there's not a weak point anywhere they told you the people who were in the south the people who were in the coast the people who were in the north the people who were in the east they saw no means of gaining entrance to that land at all and they advised against further action it was then that

[20 : 50] Caleb spoke there was no dubiety in his words no note of hesitancy in his voice let us go up at once and possess the land for we are well able to overcome it he dared to contradict the majority who were advising to go no further of the twelve spies only Caleb and Joshua followed the Lord fully and you remember what that meant for them at that time of crisis the spirit of revolt spread among the people and the singularity of Joshua and Caleb put their very lives into danger the people spoke of stoning them to the opposition that they knew awaited them in

Canaan was added this opposition of their own countrymen and it has to be admitted that the fears of the multitude seemed justified even Caleb and Joshua agreed with a report where they spoke of the challenging situation that awaited them the inhabitants of the land certainly wouldn't receive them with open arms on the contrary they would meet with the most stubborn opposition for whatever matters of disagreement separated the tribes in

Canaan the likelihood was that they would make common cause against these invaders and they were hardy warriors for the all the principal positions were very strongly fortified when the spies measured themselves against the sons of Anak whom they saw in the vicinity of Hebron they said we were as grasshoppers in our own sight and so we were in their sight weak miserable insects that could easily be tamped to death under the feet of those giants but there was one thing that they forgot to do and that was to measure the sons of

Anak against God that also made the difference between them and Caleb and Joshua Caleb and Joshua saw the magnitude of the undertaking it is quite true but whereas their brethren the ten spies who brought up an ill report of the land measured themselves against the sons of Anak Caleb and Joshua measured themselves measured the sons of Anak those giants against God and having done so Caleb said with all confidence we are well able to overcome now 40 years have passed since those incidents at Kadesh Barnea the tribes of Israel were now in the promised land they hadn't yet taken full possession the principal fortresses were still in the hands of the old inhabitants and while these inhabitants and their strongholds were unsubdued there was no security for Israel and Canaan

Hebron as we saw was in the possession of the sons of Anak men of great stature men of proved military prowess and Caleb was an older man now and yet as prepared to meet the challenge of the giants as ever he had been indeed he doesn't wait for them to challenge him he challenges them clearly then faith was the strength of this man's heart the difference between him and the spies who had brought up mental report of the land proceeded from a hidden source if he was braver than they it was because of his faith he saw that with

[26 : 19] God on his side he was more than a match for any foe like Elisha had doth and he could have said they that be with us are more than they that be with them if God be with me that was all that mattered with Caleb I shall be well able to drive them out and he believed that God would be with him for the simple reason that God had so promised and in partnership with him he was absolutely invincible now my dear friends the challenge which meets the whole hearted disciple is not less testing today than it was then it takes faith in times like these to look hopefully to the future of the cause of Christ and to believe that the victory is to be with him in the end and when we look around us at the condition of the church in our land today and indeed the condition of the church throughout the world we have to admit however sadly the admission may be wrung from us that the church doesn't answer at the present time to the description in the song of

Solomon as looking forth as the morning clear as the sun fair as the moon and terrible as an army with banners where is there a putting to flight of the armies of the alien where is the church advancing today we look abroad upon the world as it is in our time a world of boasted cleverness a world of devilish wickedness a world of deepening impurity and we ask is it possible is it possible after all that the age old hope of winning the world for Christ is going to be realized

Caleb looked back 40 years as we look back 40 years from this Sabbath evening that was around the time you remember the Dr.

J.R. Mott throughout the slogan that carried his name throughout Christendom the world for Christ in our generation our most worthy aspiration but alas it hasn't been realized does there appear to be a greater likelihood of its realization today judging by the religious and spiritual life of the nation these 40 years in review are unmistakably years of spiritual deterioration but then must we change our program must we be less challenging in our approach to the powers of evil must we consider coming to terms with the enemy that we once hoped to overcome that's what's been happening we can't halt the gambling craze our politicians told us a few years ago all that we can do is to revise our legislation with respect to gambling and sanction a good deal of what we before prohibited and in that way we'll get some semblance of control we can't have said arrest the spread of intemperance among the people let's set up a commission of inquiry into the legislation governing the drinking habits of the people and again let us sanction a good deal of what we previously prohibited to see if we can get some measure of control of the situation and we cannot bring vice under control in the country let us there again revise our legislation and cease to regard as criminal offenses things that were so regarded so judged when the old laws were framed and so it goes on but my dear friends these relaxations these revisions are the way of unbelief what we need and need desperately today surely is men and women who will follow the

Lord fully who will take up dauntlessly the challenge of evil men and women who will believe with Caleb that if only the Lord is with them they will be well able to overcome let us pass on lastly to think of the reward by which full discipleship is eventually crowned when we think of Caleb's reward our thoughts are very apt to go to this resounding victory which he did have at Hebron when he subdued and routed the giant sons of Anak as he said he was going to do but really his reward began long before then wouldn't you say that it began from the very moment that he began to follow the

[32 : 54] Lord fully it was partly this that once he began to follow the Lord fully he was rewarded with an inward peace with a tranquil mind with a strongly confident heart when we do believe in God as Caleb believed in God then as Paul puts it the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your mind shall garrison your mind and your heart through Jesus Christ our Lord half-hearted religion is a joyless thing but full commitment to God sustains the soul under every trial furthermore is it not evident that he reaped his reward in another way too and that he won the respect of his fellow men don't forget that at one time the people spoke of stoning him but men a strong character will eventually win through and capture the confidence of those who at one time mistrusted them and most of all the one who follows the Lord fully reaches the conformity to Christ himself for he above all others exemplified this spirit behold said the

Lord through Isaiah the prophet as he exhibits the coming Messiah at the lattice of prophecy behold my servant whom I uphold mine elect in whom my soul delighted there was no servant like him the zeal of God's house took possession of him it was his meat as he told the disciples to do his father's will and to finish his work and man of sorrows though he was yet he had this inward peace of which I have been speaking this joy which the world can neither give nor take away the joy which he communicated to his disciples for he said these things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain with you and that your joy might behold all this was part of the reward of the man who followed the Lord fully and then of course there was the crowning triumph the anticipated victory he took

Hebron grim strong hold though it was he dispossessed the sons of Anak of their fortress and added greatly to the security of Israel's possessions in the land that had been made over to them the head of J.G.

Payton the great missionary to the South Hebride that he was an incomparable optimist for him no good cause was ever a lost one now Caleb was a man of that spirit and he had his reward some years ago if I may bring in this reminiscence I was giving a short series of lectures at a missionary college in the South and at an interval between meetings years a veteran missionary who in a very ripe old age is still spared a veritable Caleb in my judgment happened to say to me at the lunch table what were you lecturing on this last period and I replied on the history of

Israel in the light of the prophecy of Jeremiah he looked up with interest and he said I think I was meant to ask you that question I've been a bit plagued by meetings that we've had recently where I've been meeting with young people who went out to foreign mission fields and they were dead sure when they went out that they were under the Lord's leading this was the Lord's will for them they were going out there and they were back he said within six months quite sure that the Lord hadn't meant them to go there at all the difficulties were too many for them yes he said I was led to ask you that question because I've got to address some of these young people later on today and I'm going to talk to them about Jeremiah too but not as you were talking to them about him in that last period I'm going to talk to them about Jeremiah the failure the man that God sent on a hopeless mission as men judged him the man who was opposed by the princes cast into a dungeon the man who was played false to whom his friends played false the man who brought the

[39 : 02] Lord's message to his countrymen only to be oppressed opposed persecuted imprisoned for his labor a man who died eventually a failure as men would have judged him in Egypt that's the Jeremiah I'm going to talk about he said and then he changed his tone and he said but what I'm going to stress is this that Jeremiah wasn't a failure after all for he went where God wanted him to go and he did what God wanted him to do and the cause which he represented triumphed after he was gathered to his father that was how he saw it and that's the ultimate reward of following the Lord fully it's rather accounted to

John Henry Newman that in that hymn of his lead kindly light for which I confess I've got a profound dislike it's the dismal composition of a misguided man to me a man floundering and wandering in the dark and yet so many accounted as humility to John Henry Newman that he said I do not ask to see the distant scene one step enough for me I don't think that God means us to have that outlook as disciples I think God means us to do our utmost to catch a glimpse of the distant scene to keep it ever in view ever in mind so that like Moses we can endure our seeing that which is invisible that is the thing that is so distant that it can be perceived only by faith don't you find that in the apostle

Paul one step was not enough for him the present scene was the immediate surroundings were not enough for him I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory my dear friends let's look at the distant scene let's ever bear in mind how all this is going to work out because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it from victory unto victory yes it's true his army shall he lead till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed may he add his blessing let us pray Lord we give thee thanks for these heartening words that come to us from the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we pray that we may be given grace to share his spirit and his outlook and may endure seeing him who is invisible strengthen us oh

Lord in every good work and grant that we may be filled with the spirit of Caleb who followed the Lord fully give us grace to sing thy praise as we conclude this service and undertake for us in all things for Christ's sake amen