



## TRUE GRIT

*SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP*

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Joshua 14:6-15

14th Message

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“True Grit,” one of the all-time classic western movies, is the story of a grizzly old marshal named Rooster Cogburn, who is hired by a young girl to avenge the murder of her father. Rooster is played by John Wayne, in a role that won him an Academy Award. Even though he is well on in years, Rooster is full of grit, dogged determination and a resolve to keep battling, no matter the odds. In the movie’s climactic scene, Rooster comes face to face with the bad guy, Ned Pepper, and his gang. Although outnumbered four to one, Rooster tells Pepper he is either going to kill him or take him to jail. Pepper sneers, “I call that bold talk for a one-eyed fat man.” But Rooster is true to his resolve. At the end of the movie, the young girl tells Rooster, who is sitting on his horse, that he is “too old and too fat to be jumping horses.” Rooster replies, “Well, come see a fat old man sometime.” Then he gamely flies over a fence and rides off into the sunset.

In our study in Joshua this morning we meet up with Caleb, the 85-year-old hero of chapter 14 of this wonderful book. Like Rooster Cogburn, Caleb is another grizzly old codger, a man with spiritual true grit. Together with Joshua, Caleb will help us learn how to defeat enemies and take the “land,” our life in Christ, which is our possession.

The first 12 chapters of Joshua tell the story of the taking of the land of Canaan by the Israelites. The section to which we now come, chapters 13 through 21, cover the dividing of the land among the tribes. The texts are very ordered and specific. Chapter 13 begins with the account of the land that still needs to be taken, and follows with the distribution of the land east of the Jordan. Chapter 14 deals with the distribution of the land west of the Jordan, which is bracketed on both sides with the inheritances given to Caleb and Joshua (in chapter 19)—a clear indication that everything in God’s word will be fulfilled to the letter.

Even though the conquest led by Joshua has been spectacularly successful, huge tracts of territory still needed to be possessed “little by little” (Ex. 23:30). As the various tribes take possession of their inheritance, pockets of enemies and their strongholds remained to be dealt with, indicating that our taking possession of the land and entering into rest are expandable themes. Thus, the kingdom of God could be said to be “already, but not yet.” The problem for Israel was that the land was never totally possessed.

Who was this man Caleb? Let us read the text together. Joshua 14:6-15:

**Then the sons of Judah drew near to Joshua in Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know the word which the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy**

**out the land, and I brought word back to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt with fear; but I followed the Lord my God fully. So Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God fully.’**

**“And now behold, the Lord has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years, from the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now behold, I am eighty-five years old today. I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in. Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the Lord has spoken.”**

**So Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Therefore, Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite until this day, because he followed the Lord God of Israel fully. Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba; for Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim. Then the land had rest from war.**

Caleb was one of the party of spies who, together with Joshua, had been sent out from Kadesh-Barnea to spy out the land that had been promised to Israel following their captivity in Egypt. At that time, Caleb was forty years old. When the spies saw the Anakim and Nephilim, enemies of great size inhabiting large fortified cities (Num. 13:27-29), all the spies, with the exception Joshua and Caleb, became afraid. However, when the report about the giants in the land was relayed to Moses, “Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘We should by all means go up for we can surely overcome it.’ But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us’” (Num. 13:30-31). All of Israel sided with the ten, leaving the nation to wander in the wilderness for forty years until an entire generation had passed away, except for Joshua and Caleb.

Caleb’s name means “dog.” At this point in history, dogs were anything but man’s best friend; they were fierce and mean. Perhaps this implies that Caleb was a fierce, mean, aggressive competitor. He was middle linebacker material. We also know that Caleb was not an Israelite but a Kenizzite. Caleb’s descendants came from a wild, nomadic Bedouin tribe that ranged throughout the Sinai and southern Palestine. He was a Gentile, an outsider who had

become a part of the people of God. But this outsider had more faith than the Israelites themselves.

By this time, Caleb is 85 years old. For 45 years he has been waiting for his inheritance. So, at the first opportunity, he approaches Joshua and asks for his share. Evidently, the spies had been sent to different areas in the land, and Caleb had checked out Hebron. Moses had promised him that he could have this land, and now Caleb is asking Joshua to fulfill the promise of Moses. Thus, Caleb, the Gentile, is given the honor of receiving the first portion in the land west of the Jordan.

Caleb is a gritty old soldier, just as strong at 85 as when he was 40. He “hadn’t lost a step,” as we say. If he were around today, he would drive a pick-up, not a Lexus. He would live up on Skyline, in the hill country, not down here on the peninsula. He wouldn’t wear fancy clothes. Blue jeans would suit him fine. And he wouldn’t care much for gourmet food. He would be quite happy with a diet of steak and potatoes. Caleb was an original.

As believers, we, too, are in the process of taking the land, possessing our life in Christ. And, like the Israelites in the story of Joshua, we must go to war to dispossess the enemies that live in the land. For us, of course, these enemies are the strongholds of sin and darkness. Caleb teaches us what it means to go to war so that we, too, can experience the rest that is referred to in verse 15.

Now I want to point out three principles from the text for us to ponder as we take possession of our life in Christ. Here is the first principle: In order to possess the land, we should not be afraid to take on powerful enemies.

Caleb’s choice for his possession was Hebron, in the hill country, the home of the feared Anakim, the descendants of Anak, the giants of the land. The proverb asked, “Who can stand up against the Anakites?” (Deut. 9:2). But for Caleb to take possession of this land, the Anakites had to be driven out. He wanted to dispossess the largest enemy, with the biggest fortified cities. Not for him some nice beach front property or golf course view lot. Caleb sought the high country, the toughest mountain.

Joshua had the same attitude (chapter 11). There we learn that the Canaanite tribes from the north joined together to fight against Joshua and Israel at Merom. The text says there were “as many people as the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots” (11:4). In spite of the numbers, God directed Joshua to attack. He led Israel in a preemptive strike, and God gave them a great victory. Then Joshua attacked Hazor, the largest and best fortified city, and burned it to the ground. He went into the nerve center of the northern tribes and blew it up, conquering the strongest city first.

If we want to take possession of life in Christ, then we must be willing, even eager, to take on the biggest, most powerful enemy in our life. As the saying goes, the bigger they are, the harder they will fall.

When my son was in the seventh grade, he announced that he wanted to play football. As much as I love football, I tried to talk him out of it, because he was a bit on the small side. However, he was determined. The day we signed him up he was the smallest kid on the team. The coaches tried to get him to lose a couple of pounds so that he could play in a lower division, but he didn’t have

enough poundage on him to lose that much. During the first week of practice, he was a little fearful. There were “giants” in the land, kids who outweighed him by 25 pounds or more. He thought about quitting. By week’s end, however, things looked a little better. Then they had a scrimmage. Johnny was playing defense, and the biggest, fastest kid on the team burst through the line carrying the ball, straight at my son. Johnny went low, took the kid by the ankles, and flipped him head over heels. The coaches went crazy, and Johnny’s fears disappeared. The Caleb attitude takes on the toughest assignment.

What is your biggest enemy, your greatest fear? It doesn’t take long for you to identify it, does it? You recognize it in a heartbeat. Maybe it is a deep rooted sin or habit, a worry that is controlling and enslaving you, a painful job situation, a hurting marriage or a fractured relationship with your child. Are you willing to go to war against that enemy? Our natural tendency is to play it safe and fight the enemies we think we can handle. We don’t go after the nerve center, the supply lines, the heart. We can’t take on all the enemies at the same time, of course, but, like Caleb, let us pick a powerful foe to begin with.

Let me illustrate. Perhaps you have a problem with anger that is destroying your life. If you do, that probably is symptomatic of a deep hurt and pain. Are you willing to face the bigger issue, to go beyond the behavioral problem on the surface to attack the nerve center? Maybe you like to be in control. Have you uncovered the hidden fears that drive that tendency? Maybe you have a problem with sexual addiction. Underneath lies a deeper issue, a desire for love and intimacy that has never been acknowledged and dealt with. Maybe you are fearful of taking on more responsibility at work, getting involved in ministry or sharing the gospel. But the real enemy lies underneath: it is a deep sense of worthlessness, of inadequacy or fear of failure. If we are going to take possession of the land, however, then we must drive out these strongholds and put Christ at the center. He is our self-esteem, our sense of worthiness, our adequacy, and we are his beloved bride.

Have you ever wondered why God wants us to take on such powerful forces? Why does he put Anakim in our lives? It is so that we might know the strength of his might and power. We tend to take on the little things, because we trust in ourselves. But we need God on our side when we take on the giants that intimidate us. This what Caleb meant when he said, “perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I shall dispossess them as the Lord has spoken” (verse 12). He didn’t have the resources within himself to go against his feared enemy, but he knew that God did. The apostle Paul said, “we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9). If we take on only what we think we can handle, then we will never know the strength of God and we will not possess the land. The principle here is that we are to go into the heart of enemy territory, into the stronghold, the nerve center, and blow it up. We must live by faith, not by sight.

Here is my second principle: In order to possess the land, we must follow the Lord fully.

Certainly, this is a major emphasis in our text. The phrase, “follow the Lord fully,” is repeated three times (8, 9, 14). The same words are used to describe Caleb on three other occasions (Num. 14:24, 32:11-12; Deut. 1:36). In fact,

in Numbers 32 the words are applied to both Joshua and Caleb: “None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully” (11,12). This phrase is also used in 1 Kings, with reference to Solomon and David: “Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD *fully*, as David his father *had done*” (11:6).

The word “fully,” which comes from a verb that applies to both space and time, means fullness, completeness. Referring to space, it means to fill up something; with reference to time, it means to fulfill, to bring to completion. God’s life in Caleb was fulfilled because God filled him. He followed the Lord completely and wholeheartedly. He was sold out to God, living the kind of life that God intended for him. What a tremendous testimony to this man’s godliness! And what a wonderful epitaph: He followed the Lord fully. This is what defined Caleb as a man.

To “follow the Lord fully” means to become his disciple. It means we have to choose God over our own desires, leaving the world behind and following after him. And this involves more than just doing the right thing and avoiding the wrong thing. It doesn’t mean that we don’t sin. After all, this phrase is spoken of David, and we know what David did. Following the Lord fully means that we are being transformed into the image of Christ as our character is changed from within. We begin to think like Christ, to talk like him and walk like him. As David Roper says, “Following Jesus means walking with him, worshipping him, practicing his presence, loving him, sitting at his feet, listening to him, ‘trying to learn what is pleasing to him,’ as Paul would say.”

Whenever my daughter walks out our front door, our neighbors’ three kids follow after her. They hang on her heels and pepper her with questions. They think she is special. Maybe your kids do that with you. Following the Lord fully means we keep following right on his heels, because we are happy and excited to be with him.

Godliness just doesn’t just come about overnight, however. For most of us, the journey is rather lengthy. It involves dealing with deep soul issues, dying to ourselves and letting God have complete control of our lives. It involves all the little choices that we make every day, the sum of which determines our character. Caleb represents a lifetime of making good choices.

Following the Lord fully: this was Caleb’s and Joshua’s secret. And it can be ours, too. The God who empowered these men is the same God who empowers us today. We, too, can follow him fully. This is what will give us confidence when we begin to take on the giants in our life. This is what will allow us to face difficulties and pressures. This is what will give us poise and character and beauty in the face of powerful spiritual enemies.

And finally, our third principle: Taking possession of the land is a lifelong proposition.

God’s warrior never thinks about retirement. Following the Lord fully is a process that goes on until the end of our days. At the time when most men were long into retirement, Caleb was going out to war. At 85, he wanted to take on the Anakim.

Our society is preoccupied with stockpiling so that we can have a life of pleasure and luxury when we are old. Life begins when we retire, we hear. What does that say of life before we retire? Madison Avenue tells us that if we don’t retire to a life of ease, we have failed. That’s a big lie. My own father worked hard every day of his life, waiting for retirement. His greatest fear was that when he finally retired, he would die. That’s close to what happened. Our life is a gift from God. Let us live every day for his glory, in whatever capacity he gives us. He did not put his life inside us to waste it or to spend it on ourselves.

Caleb is a wonderful model for us. What a great encouragement he is to people like me who are getting older. We tend to lose heart as we age. Our physical strength abates; our health deteriorates; our minds grow foggy; our memories fade. I am losing my hearing now, and I need glasses to read. The cartilage in one of my knees is giving out. My back and neck are in constant pain, and some of my body parts take a long time to wake up in the morning. Getting old is no fun. It can get downright depressing.

But Caleb encourages us. We don’t have to decline in usefulness as we age. Getting older doesn’t mean we become obsolete. It can mean growing, maturing, serving, ministering, enjoying ourselves to the end of our days. Caleb was 85, but he was not about to stagnate or retire. He wanted Hebron, the hill country. And that is exactly what he got, as we read in chapter 15: “Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai, the children of Anak” (15:14).

But the story doesn’t end there. It has a footnote. Caleb promised his daughter Acsah to the man who attacked and captured Debir. Othniel, Caleb’s younger brother, took on the challenge and saw it through. Maybe I should try this with my daughters! Othniel would later become the first judge in Israel, the man who saved the nation from Cushan-Tishathaim, king of Aram.

Caleb’s legacy was to empower the next generation to “follow the Lord fully.” What a wonderful vision this is for the church today as each one of us is committed to training the next generation for Christ!

It was T.S. Eliot who said “old men ought to be explorers.” I think of people like Hudson Taylor, Mother Teresa, and Oswald Chambers. These were ordinary people just like you and me who did extraordinary things, because they fully followed an extraordinary God. Caleb and Joshua are proof that one woman or one man, with God, and following him fully, can make an amazing difference. Do you want to be a Caleb? Do you want to follow the Lord fully and take on your greatest enemy? Are you ready for new challenges and new adventures?

I believe we have a Caleb in our midst. Marty Mathiesen has been a faithful servant among us for a long time. He has been through some deep waters, and yet he is not content to sit on the bench; he wants to remain a player. Marty has a vision for the future, and I have asked him to come and share his heart and passion with us.

**Marty Mathiesen:** John has asked me to share about some of the battles I have been involved in. The last time I spoke from this platform was four years ago. The occasion

was my wife's memorial service. We had been married for 33 years, and had dated for 37 years, and over that time our love for each other had grown exponentially. I could not have asked for a better wife. Our children could not have asked for a better mother. Then, suddenly, we found ourselves in a battle. That is what I want to share with you this morning.

Six years ago, Brenda was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor. The doctors told us there was nothing they could do. They could extend the time she had left by treating her with chemotherapy and radiation, but they said she had only a few months to live. What do you say when you hear something like that? I didn't know then, and I confess I still don't know. Looking back now, I suppose I would regard such news more as an opportunity than a battle. It was an opportunity to trust the Lord, to grow in my faith and learn what he wanted me to learn.

The thing that helped us so much in the 18-month battle before Brenda went home to be with the Lord was that every day he sent one of his warriors, believers from our church and other churches, to minister to us. As the weeks went by, people from all over the world who had heard about her response to her battle were praying for her. Every day, God walked beside us, holding our hands, even carrying us at times. He was using everything that was happening to us for his glory, and helping me to grow in my faith and trust in him.

I can say now that the peace that we as a family experienced through that time truly passed all understanding. While I would not wish for any one of you to face such a battle, know that the Lord will grant you that peace too if you listen to what he is saying to you through your battles. I know that at many times during that period I felt like asking, "Why?" Looking back on it, I probably did ask that question. But I knew enough to know that God did not have to tell me why. I knew I had to trust him.

Brenda had been the center of my life. We were inseparable. What would I do? A few months after her death, I was sitting here in church, feeling a deep void. Something is wrong here, I thought. I'm missing something. It was then I realized that I wasn't doing anything or involved in anything. That was the void I felt. I was sitting in church, soaking things in, not giving anything in return, so there was no more room left in me for the Lord to fill. I prayed and asked him what he wanted me to do.

Then I picked up our bulletin and read about a need for someone to work with our two-year-olds, and the following Sunday I found myself sitting among them. Now, I'm

six feet five inches tall, and much older than John Hanne-man. I have even more aches than he has, and my two eyes would equal about one good eye. You should see me getting down on the floor and getting up again several times each Sunday morning with these little ones. It's a sight.

That was four years ago, and I'm still working with them. As I started to give something out, the Lord began to fill me. I began to give back to some of those people who worked with the children while my own kids were growing up, so that I could be here in church. And how rewarding it was to know that some of you parents could be in church while I and some other workers loved your two-year-olds. An extra added thrill is to see the look of excitement on the faces of these little ones as we greet them each Sunday morning.

But, as I near retirement, I know that will come to an end, too. I'm a high school teacher, and, as retirement looms, I have been wondering, what next? Plant flowers? Visit a few beaches and watch the sun set? These don't sound very fulfilling. I asked myself, what do I enjoy doing? And what am I good at? Those questions were easy to answer. I love teaching. I love working with teenagers. And I love traveling overseas.

Earlier in our marriage, my wife and I had spent two years working in Ethiopia with the Peace Corps and two more years in Liberia. Back then, we spent a lot of time getting to know missionaries. So, I love kids, I love teaching teenagers, and I love being overseas. I wondered, what about teaching in an overseas missions school somewhere, Africa, South America or Asia? That seemed to fit all the criteria. With my retirement plan from teaching all those years I'm able to support myself, so I don't need to raise funds.

When I interviewed with one agency last summer, they asked me if I could go the next day! I told them I still had a few obligations remaining, but I know that down the road a little, I will be able to go. I don't know what battles or what giants I will face when I get there, but God has given me a vision, and he will be with me to comfort and guide me.

Earlier, John made mention of the "good" life. I would like to take one letter out of that word and talk about the "God" life. My wife and I had a very good life while we were together. But all that will come to an end one day. Now what I hope to focus on and be attuned to is God's life and how he wants me to handle the battles ahead as I strive to be his witness here on earth. I pray he will give me strength to keep doing that.

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