

Joshua – a reflection on his life – Rev Paul Day

There is a lot in the Bible about the exploits of Joshua – Moses' assistant who became his successor and led the people of Israel into the promised land. However, there is precious little about him as a person or of his family. There is a mention of his household, and that he lived to the ripe old age of 110, but little else. I have taken the liberty of inventing a great grandson for him – let's call him Caleb – who loves hearing the stories his Great Grandad tells.

Caleb approached his Great Grandad who was, as he always seemed to be these days, dozing in the sun outside the house.

“Great Grandad Joshua – look at this. Look what I've found – it's a grasshopper!” he called out. The old man stirred and looked up. On seeing the grasshopper his eyes began to well up with tears.

“What's the matter, Great Grandad Joshua?” Caleb asked.

“It's the grasshopper. It takes me right back. Did I ever tell you about the time I was sent to spy out the promised land?”

“You know that we – that's all of the Israelites - all of the tribes. You know that we were slaves in Egypt, and you know how God rescued us from slavery. How he helped us escape from the Egyptians. How he led us through the Red Sea and drowned all the armies of the Egyptians? I am sure I've told you those stories before.

“It was hard work trying to make the people all march together. Moses had many struggles with them, but we all knew that the journey would be worthwhile. We had all heard of the land that God was promising us. A land flowing with milk and honey was what God promised. And it is. We know that now of course.

“Things were tough at times – but God always provided for us. Be it water, food or protection. I remember the time Moses asked me to lead the battle against the Amalekites. Poor old Moses – he had to stand with his arms outstretched to heaven. Every time his arms drooped we started to lose; but as long as he kept his arms high we were on top. In the end we had to get Aaron

and Hur to hold his arms high – one on each side – until we had won. Makes me laugh just to think of it.

“But the grasshopper. Let me tell you about the grasshopper. We were on the verge of the promised land. Moses was all for going straight into the land there and then. After all God had said it was ours for the taking, and we knew how God had been with us as we escaped from Egypt and as we had moved on since then. But the people were worried. They didn’t trust God like Moses did, or like he had taught me to. They begged that he send spies into the land to see what it was like, and to see whether we had the strength and numbers to conquer it.

“Moses, as he so often did, reluctantly agreed to their request and sent 12 of us to explore – I was chosen to be one, and my friend Caleb as another. We spent about 40 days looking at the land, going around the towns and cities, trying to be as inconspicuous as we could be. We carried back to the people some of the fruit of the land. Grapes and pomegranates and figs. Things we had just dreamt about since we left Egypt. I thought it looked wonderful and couldn’t wait to get started.

“But some of the others felt differently. They were scared. True, the cities were well fortified and the people who lived there looked strong and well-armed. But we had God with us. And we knew what that meant! I was amazed when the other spies started saying how the people who lived there were like giants, and we in comparison were like grasshoppers. Soon all the people were terrified and started complaining to Moses again. Why couldn’t we have stayed in Egypt? Why did you lead us here just to die.

“Caleb and I tried to say that all would be OK. We could conquer this land because God was with us. But no one listened. And that made God angry. That was when the ‘wanderings’ began. It seemed like we wandered round and round in the wilderness for years. Waiting for all those who had left Egypt to die. Only then could we enter the land because God had said that no one who came out of Egypt – not even Moses – would be able to enter the promised land now. Only me and Caleb because we had shown that we trusted in him. That’s where you got your name from of course. Caleb. My good friend Caleb.”

Joshua closed his eyes as if in deep thought; his mind recalling those days now in the distant past. Young Caleb thought he was dozing off again, and wanted to hear the story of how Joshua had led the people into the promised land.

How the waters of the River Jordan - even though the river was in flood - had parted to let them through on dry land. How they had marched around the city of Jericho every day for a week, then marched around it seven times on the seventh day before blowing the trumpets and shouting loudly. How the walls of Jericho simply fell down before them and how they were able to march in and take the city.

Caleb loved to hear the stories of how his Great Grandad had led the people to conquer city after city. How on one occasion the sun had actually stood still in the sky so that they could defeat the Amorites. And how he had made sure that everyone – every tribe – had their own piece of the land that God had promised to his people.

Joshua stirred again. Caleb asked for some more stories, but Joshua was in more pensive mood.

“Caleb, I want you to grow up to be like my good friend Caleb from all those years ago. I want you to trust God like he did. Like Moses did and like I do. I want you to remember all these stories I’ve told you. Don’t just remember them for the action and the battles, remember them because they tell of how faithful God has always been.

“I want you to remember how God was always with us through those wanderings. How even when the people turned against him he never gave up on them. How he had promised this land to us and how he was with us as we conquered it and settled in it.

“I want you to remember how he has always been faithful to me – and how I have always tried to trust him. I want you to remember the story I told you of how I met the commander of the Lord’s army outside Jericho. It was like standing face to face with God himself. It was like when Moses met God on the mountain.

“And I want you to remember those words I said to the people of Israel after we had conquered and settled in the land. I think I mentioned those words to you before - they are so important. I challenged the people to choose between serving the so called gods of this land and serving the true God who has been faithful to us right from Egypt, through the desert and into the promised land. And I said ‘As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!’ The people all shouted that they would serve God too.

“Caleb, will you promise you will serve the one true God when you grow up. Be like my old friend and your namesake. Be a giant, not a grasshopper. Serve God”

And with that he drifted off to sleep again. Young Caleb sat quietly, and thought and prayed.