

A View From the Top, Week 5: Beyond the Obstacles

May 26, 2024

Joshua 14:6-14

Intro self.

Final week of our series, “A View From the Top” where we have been looking at different mountaintop experiences in the Bible. And today as we wrap up, we’re going to be exploring what it’s like when we SEE where we want to go, or we SEE what we want...and there are some obstacles in the way.

My family used to live in Pasadena and one of our favorite places was **(SLIDE) Griffith observatory**. It’s such a cool spot because you have these 360 panoramic views of Los Angeles. And if you look west, especially, you can see all these famous and exciting things. You can see down into Hollywood. You can see where my favorite restaurant is. On a clear day, you can see all the way to the beach. It’s awesome!

AND...it’s also LA. So even though you can SEE those places, getting to them can be a real challenge. If you’ve ever driven in LA or just seen a movie, you KNOW that getting from point A to point B, even if they are just a few miles apart can be a daunting task. To get from the observatory to the nearest beach SHOULD, in theory, be a straight shot. Except there’s this little thing called a mountain range. And so you have to go down and around the mountains, onto the freeway, which is probably bright red on Google maps, at all hours of the day, and that adds on miles and traffic and lots of time.

**So (SLIDE) sometimes, we must navigate through obstacles to get where we're hoping to go.**

And that brings us to this story of Caleb and Joshua and the divvying up of this piece of land that you heard in our scripture reading today. I want to tell you a little bit about Caleb, if you're not super familiar with him already. We first meet Caleb all the way back in the book of Numbers, he and Joshua are two of the leaders who Moses sends to explore the land that God has told them they will inhabit. And so they go, and this group of leaders bring back a complicated report—they say that on one hand, the land is awesome; it's got everything we need or could want; it's the "land flowing with milk and honey" which sounds a lot better than this wilderness that they've been hanging out in for awhile.

BUT—the land is populated. And the people that live there are intimidating, they're scary. And so instead of celebrating all these great things that it seems like God is setting up for them in a new place...the leaders start to panic. They say, there's no way we're going there. God's clearly made some kind of mistake and we need to bail on this plan; it isn't safe!

So things quickly begin to spiral into chaos. And it's IN the chaos, and it's in the midst of all of that, that we hear Caleb speak up. He tries to provide some kind of balance to all this fear and says I actually think we're going to be ok. I think God is going to be with us and we can do this.

And it's a very inspirational moment...but you know people don't listen the first time, so there's more pandemonium and Caleb and Joshua take a stand. And as they do that, they call the people to faithfulness and to remember who God is and what God has done for them.

So that's the beginning of Caleb's story. And today, we come to a spot pretty close to the end. In that story I just told Caleb was a young man. Now, he's 85 years old. Moses is long gone, Joshua is in charge and they are in the land, finally, and in the middle of this process to divide up the land that they have been acquiring among the leaders.

And it's kind of a complicated system. It goes back to this thing that Moses says in Numbers 34, that they were going to need to have a way to divide up and take care of all this land they were about to be in charge of. And they were going to do that by casting lots and seeing who got what. So it's a bit of game of chance, on who is going to get what and end up where. You might really get some prime real estate, or it might just be ok. There's not a ton of control here. And you can imagine that's kind of stressful because this is going to be where your family, your tribe that you represent, this is going to be where you live for generations. Depending on who you are and what you're trying to do, where you end up matters a lot.

And I know you may not have come to church on Race Day to learn about ancient near eastern land allotment processes. I don't know why not, but it feels possible. But here's why this

matters: I want you to understand the obstacle that Caleb was facing here. I want you to understand that it was significant, it was systemic, and it had consequences that would make a very real impact on his future. He was up against something that could have very permanently gotten in the way of where he wanted to be.

And so Caleb has to navigate this obstacle. He has to use his faith and his resources, and one of his biggest resources is that he knows the FULL extent of what Moses had to say about dividing up land, which was that it DID have a randomness to it...but it wasn't completely by chance. Because beyond setting up this lot system, Moses had said something else too. He said that to the largest tribe went the largest land, and guess who Caleb represents? The largest one, the tribe of Judah, and that means...he's entitled by LAW to have this thing that he wants.

Now, even though he's got that going for him, that doesn't mean it's easy. And he has to be a little bit assertive about getting what he wants here. He has to speak up and remind people of this law. He has to say, "I know who I am and I know what God has for me." He has to remember that even though he's getting older and even though this feels like a sticky situation...God is still at work.

You know, sometimes we have to remember that too. That no matter how hard things get, no matter how tired or irrelevant we might feel, no matter how overwhelming the thing in front of us might be, we have to remember that

**(SLIDE) Our stories do not end with the obstacle.**

And we think that sometimes, because that's human. We run up against something that feels bigger than us, beyond our control, and we can make the mistake of believing that when it gets hard that means it's probably time to throw up our hands and walk away. We think that the thing we want would be better for someone else or maybe that it's just too much and we don't have what we need to be part of whatever "it" is.

But I love this story of Caleb here because he is aware that just because there's an obstacle doesn't mean that it's not the right thing or he's not supposed to pursue that path. And even though he runs into something that feels really challenging and difficult, he doesn't shrink away from the challenge in front of him—he actually leans in. He pushes back. He reminds the people of who he is and what he knows to be true. He KNOWS who God is and he holds on to all of it. Despite the fact that there could be a million reasons to back down...Caleb keeps going.

And what Caleb does here, it benefits him in the short term, but it goes so much further than him. If you look at v. 14 it says: ***(SLIDE) So Hebron still belongs to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite as a legacy today. This was because he remained loyal to the LORD God of Israel.***

The fact that Caleb had enough faith to move through the obstacle in front of him, that was what sets up the future; it sets up success for a whole group of people. It shapes this big,

collective story that the people carry forward. This book of Joshua, it was likely written HUNDREDS of years after these events would have taken place, so that means this was handed down likely by word of mouth, people wanted to tell this story. And this was written at a time when the people writing it—they weren't IN that land anymore. They were most likely living in exile, away from their land and their homes, but this legacy was SO POWERFUL that they were still talking about it. Even though they were encountering their own obstacles...Caleb's story was still making an impact. His legacy still mattered.

As I was thinking about this idea of legacy, and especially as we're talking about this on Memorial Day Weekend, it made me think about my husband, Zack's, grandpa, **(SLIDE)** Donald Moomaw. He was a WW2 Vet. He flew B-26 planes in Europe and amazingly came home to tell the story. And he and Zack's grandma, **(SLIDE)** Betty, lived to be 92 and 93 and are both buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

And Don and Betty created this very intentional legacy with their family. It really mattered to Don that future generations knew their family story. It really mattered that they knew EACH OTHER and were connected even as Don and Betty moved into their elder years.

And that might sound simple, but it wasn't easy. In this case the obstacle faced as they tried to build these family ties that would really last was just plain geography! They had to contend with the fact that their family was scattered ALL over North and

at one point even South America, through multiple states and countries and different phases of life. But because of them, and their love, and their intentionality in bringing people together...we overcame the obstacles to make it happen. In fact, last summer **(SLIDE)** we all got together in Ohio to celebrate what would have been Don's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Neither he or Betty still living, but the legacy being lived out. And from all over the world, to Burr Oak State Park, we kept creating that story that meant so much to them. I don't know that Don and Betty could have predicted anything like that, but their actions, their ability to persist despite the obstacles in front of them, those things absolutely set the stage for that legacy to become a reality.

And sometimes we break through obstacles and we reap the benefits like that. Sometimes we get to see our legacy, sometimes we don't, but it's clear that we are walking alongside God to create something good for ourselves. And I think that's so important—to pay attention like that, to know who we are and whose we are, to create those sorts of lives. But I don't want to ignore that there's another side to overcoming obstacles—sometimes it's not about us, or for us at all. **(SLIDE) Sometimes God calls us to be barrier breakers to make a way for someone else.**

There's an important element of this in Caleb's story. Because while you've got this tenacious faith that Caleb brings to the table, you've also got the wisdom and leadership of Joshua

working alongside it. Joshua had a lot of power here and he could have squashed the whole request. He could have said, “Caleb, you’re great, we’ve been through some things together. But I’m not going to do it your way.”

He could have. You and I have all probably been on the very frustrating receiving end of something like that. When someone COULD have opened a door, they COULD have made a way for us, but for whatever reason...it didn’t happen.

We could all tell that story. AND. My guess is we could all tell the kind of story that Joshua embodies here too. I want you to think about your own life. Think about a time when someone took a risk and put themselves out there and looked out for what would help you get where you wanted to go. Think about that person who opened the door for you and helped move that obstacle.

I don’t know that we always fully appreciate that in the moment. But when people do that work on our behalf, we have to acknowledge that it can come with so much risk. It turns out fine for Joshua in this story, but it might not have. People could have been angry, they could have turned on him as the leader. At the very least, it could have been a giant headache and he could have gotten a lot of angry emails. Moving obstacles on someone else’s behalf is not always the work that is going to make everyone happy or make you, as the obstacle-mover, super popular.



But it is absolutely work worth doing. I wouldn't be here, sharing this message today, if people hadn't done that for me. You might know that I grew up in a tradition where THIS—a woman preaching the Sunday morning sermon...that wasn't a thing that I EVER saw. It wasn't a thing I even knew was possible.

And so when I started feeling this call to go in ministry, it was like "oh this is awkward...do we do this? Is this ok?" And there WERE barriers. There WERE obstacles. But what I also knew is there were so many people in my corner. There were people who knew my story and knew my calling and even though it didn't make any sense with the rules that they were told were in place, they still said YES to me. They moved barriers out of the way. They put me in places to serve, they connected me to more people, they created opportunities to live out this call that I was feeling. They made a way for me on purpose.

And if it hadn't been for those people and their willingness to break down obstacles and do all that...could God still have moved? Sure. Because God can make a way when it needs to be made. But I think this story is so much more beautiful and powerful because people came alongside what God was doing and let themselves be part of that work.

And if you have a story like that, where you can name the people who have helped you get past the obstacles in front of you, then my deep hope...is that you also have a story where you've done that for someone else. Because sometimes we are

the ones who staring down the obstacle, working so hard to be seen and to move to the place we want to go. And sometimes, we have a unique position to be the one who can help make a move. We get to open the door for someone else. Sometimes God puts us in this position of being like Joshua, where we have a voice, we have influence, and we have the knowledge of what could be possible for that person in front of us.

So as you hear this story today, where do you find yourself? What do you need to take from it? Maybe action looks like standing up for who you are and what you know God is doing. Maybe you need to make a bold move. And maybe, God is putting someone in your life right now who you have a unique opportunity to help make a way for.

Wherever you find yourself, **(SLIDE) when we can be bold enough to move beyond the obstacles...it makes an impact.**

We're going to close today by singing this song called Do It Again. And this song may or may not be familiar to you, but what I think is so powerful about it is that it flows from this story of Joshua and Caleb and it really reminds us that even when the obstacles we encounter are SO big...God still moves.

Let's pray.