

GIVE ME THESE MOUNTAINS

JOSHUA 14:11-12, "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," (NASB). CALEB IS UNCONQUERABLE. **EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS OLD** AND **ASKING FOR MORE MOUNTAINS TO CONQUER!**

INTRODUCTION

SOME YEARS AGO AN ELDERLY MAN WAS MAKING **A SPEECH AT A PUBLIC GATHERING**, AND HE BEGAN BY SAYING: "ACCORDING TO THE CALENDAR I AM **AN OLDISH MAN**, BUT A FEW DAYS AGO I PLAYED **BASEBALL** WITH **SOME BOYS** AND I MADE A **TWO-BASE HIT**. WHEN I GOT TO **SECOND**, MY BREATH WAS ON **FIRST**, BUT MY **HEART WAS ON THIRD**." MANY OF US CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT HE WAS TRYING TO SAY! NOT ALL OF US WILL HAVE THE DIVINELY-GIVEN PHYSICAL STRENGTH OF CALEB AT 85, BUT WE CAN ALL, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, HAVE THE **SAME SPIRIT**—THE SPIRIT THAT DEMANDS, "**GIVE ME THESE MOUNTAINS!**"

I. CALEB ASKS FOR MORE **MOUNTAINS OF CHALLENGE AND ACHIEVEMENT**.

A. CALEB WAS EIGHTY-FIVE PHYSICALLY, BUT HE HAD **THE MIND OF A MIDDLE-AGE ADULT WARRIOR**. HE WAS NOT READY TO BE PUT OUT TO PASTURE.

NO ONE SAYS **OLD AGE IS BETTER THAN YOUTH**, BUT NEITHER IS YOUTH BETTER THAN OLD AGE. **EACH AGE HAS ITS ADVANTAGES AND COMPENSATIONS**, ITS TEMPTATIONS, DISCIPLINES, BLESSINGS, AND VICTORIES.

THERE IS A STANZA LEFT OUT OF ONE OF OUR GREAT CHRISTIAN HYMNS, WHICH WE NEED TO REMEMBER. IT WAS FOR MANY YEARS INCLUDED IN "**HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION**," WHICH DATES FROM 1787, BUT YOU SELDOM HEAR IT ANYMORE. IT GOES LIKE THIS:

"E'EN DOWN TO OLD AGE,
ALL MY PEOPLE SHALL PROVE
MY SOVEREIGN, ETERNAL,
UNCHANGEABLE LOVE:
AND WHEN HOARY HAIRS
SHALL THEIR TEMPLES ADORN,
LIKE LAMBS THEY SHALL STILL
IN MY BOSOM BE BORNE."

THIS IS SO MUCH IN KEEPING WITH THE PRAYER OF THE PSALMIST: ""SO EVEN TO OLD AGE AND GRAY HAIRS, O GOD, DO NOT FORSAKE ME" (71:18).

B. SOME 85 YR OLD PEOPLE TODAY, PERHAPS MANY, DON'T SEEK ANY GREAT CHALLENGES, AND MAY BE READY TO RETIRE AND TAKE IT EASY. BUT IT IS WRONG TO TREAT EVERYONE THE SAME WAY AND TO ASSUME THAT NO ELDERLY PEOPLE WANT TO DO SOMETHING CHALLENGING AND CONSTRUCTIVE. THIS SHOULD BE THEIR INDIVIDUAL DECISION. I SHOULD NOT BE FORCED UPON THEM BY SOCIETY OR BY THEIR FAMILIES.

ROBERT BROWNING IN HIS POEM "RABBI BEN EZRA" SUGGESTED THAT OLD AGE MIGHT REALLY BE THE BEST PART OF LIFE:

"GROW OLD ALONG WITH ME!
THE BEST IS YET TO BE.
THE LAST OF LIFE,
FOR WHICH THE FIRST WAS MADE:
OUR TIMES ARE IN HIS HAND
WHO SAITH "A WHOLE I PLANNED,
YOUTH SHOWS BUT HALF: TRUST GOD;
SEE ALL, NOR BE AFRAID!"

C. MILTON IN HIS GREAT EPIC POEM ABOUT SAMSON IMAGINES THAT SAMSON'S FATHER MANOA AND DELILA CAME TO HIM IN THE PRISON IN GAZA AND TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM TO LET THEM TRY TO GET HIM RELEASED AND SPEND HIS LAST YEARS IN QUIET RETIREMENT IN HIS HOME VILLAGE. HE WOULD NOT HEAR OF IT. HE WANTED TO BE "USEFUL" IN HIS LIFE, HOWEVER SHORT OR LONG IT MIGHT BE.

SAMSON'S OWN WORDS, IN MILTON'S FERTILE IMAGINATION, WERE:

"TO WHAT CAN I BE USEFUL, WHEREIN SERVE
MY NATION, AND THE WORK FROM HEAV'N IMPOS'D,
BUT TO SIT IDLE ON THE HOUSEHOLD HEARTH,
A BURDENOUS DRONE; TO VISITANTS A GAZE
OR PITIED OBJECT, THESE REDUNDANT LOCKS
ROBUSTIOUS TO NO PURPOSE CLUST'RING DOWN,
VAIN MONUMENT OF STRENGTH;
TILL LENGTH OF YEARS
AND SEDENTARY NUMBNESS CRAZE MY LIMBS
TO A CONTEMPTIBLE OLD AGE OBSCURE."
(SAMSON AGONISTES, LINES 564-572)

THIS IS THE SPIRIT THAT MAKES SAMSON A HEROIC FIGURE, AND IN IT WE SEE SOMETHING OF THE HEROIC CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE.

D. MOST RETIRED ELDERLY PEOPLE TODAY WANT TO BE USEFUL AND PRODUCTIVE. THIS IS ESPECIALLY SO IF ONE IS A CHRISTIAN. GOD EXPECTS US TO BE USEFUL AND FRUITFUL AND FAITHFUL TO HIM EVEN TO DEATH. SOME WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO BE USEFUL IN WAYS DIFFERENT FROM THE WAYS THEY WERE USEFUL AND ACTIVE IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRISTIAN WORK WHEN THEY WERE YOUNGER, BUT THEY WANT TO BE AS USEFUL AND ACTIVE AS THEY CAN WITHIN THEIR LIMITATIONS.

II. CALEB ASKS FOR MORE MOUNTAINS OF DIGNITY AND RESPECT.

A. CALEB IS NOT BEGGING; HE IS DEMANDING. OLDER CITIZENS SHOULD NOT HAVE TO BEG FOR WHAT IS RIGHT. OTHER PEOPLE DEMAND; WOMEN DEMAND THINGS TODAY; MINORITIES DEMAND RIGHTS; WORKERS MAKE DEMANDS; WHY SHOULDN'T OLD PEOPLE MAKE DEMANDS?

B. SHARON CURTIN, IN HER FINE BOOK NOBODY EVER DIED OF OLD AGE, WROTE:

"OUR MODERN CULTURE AND SOCIETY HAS DONE A GREAT INJUSTICE TO OUR OLDER CITIZENS. WE HAVE ROBBED THEM OF HUMAN DIGNITY, OF PERSONAL FREEDOM, AND OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTINUE TO BE ACTIVE AND USEFUL ALL THEIR

LIFE. OFTEN WE HAVE SENT THEM INTO IMPERSONAL RETIREMENT INSTITUTIONS WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT, AND INDEED AGAINST THEIR WILL. EVERY DECISION AND CHOICE DAY AND NIGHT IS MADE FOR THEM BY OTHERS; THEY MUST CONFORM TO THE ROUTINE AND RIGID SCHEDULE AND STYLE OF LIFE. OTHERS CONSTANTLY HAVE TREMENDOUS POWER OVER THEM. THEY ARE NOT GIVEN THE PRIVILEGE OF DOING ANYTHING PERSONALLY MEANINGFUL TO THEM, WHICH WILL ALLOW THEM TO BE USEFUL OR PRODUCTIVE. THEIR SO-CALLED FREE TIME IS PLANNED FOR THEM WITHIN CERTAIN CHILDISH AND MEANINGLESS GAMES OR CRAFTS. "SOMEHOW WE HAVE TO CHANGE THAT," WRITES ~~SHARON~~ CURTIN (PP. 227-28).

C. ONE OF THE GREAT SHAMES OF OUR MODERN WESTERN SOCIETY IS ITS CONTEMPT FOR THE OLDER GENERATION. IT IS NOT THIS WAY IN THE ORIENT. A PROFESSOR ONCE ASKED SOME JAPANESE PEOPLE, "WHAT IS CONSIDERED THE SUPREME GOOD IN YOUR COUNTRY?" THE QUICK ANSWER WAS, "OUR OLD PEOPLE." HOW DIFFERENT IT IS IN OUR COUNTRY.

D. THE BIBLE IS CLEAR ABOUT REQUIRING HONOR AND RESPECT FOR THE ELDERLY. IT IS AS BASIC AS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, AND AS FUNDAMENTAL AS THE PASTORAL EPISTLES AND ALL THE N.T. LETTERS WRITTEN TO THE CHURCHES OF THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

E. THERE IS AN INTERESTING VERSE NEAR THE END OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN WHICH THROWS LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT OF AGEING. THE RISEN SAVIOR IS TALKING TO THE APOSTLE PETER, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY UNTO YOU, WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG, YOU GIRDED YOURSELF AND WALKED WHERE YOU WOULD; BUT WHEN YOU ARE OLD YOU WILL STRETCH OUT YOUR HANDS, AND ANOTHER WILL GIRD YOU AND CARRY YOU WHERE YOU DO NOT WISH TO GO." NOTICE THAT JESUS DOES NOT APPROVE OF THIS WAY OF TREATING OLD PEOPLE; HE SIMPLY SAYS THIS IS WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO PETER SOME DAY.

MANY PEOPLE HAVE FOUND THAT WHEN THEY GROW OLD THEY LOSE CONTROL OVER THEIR PERSONAL AFFAIRS; OTHERS DRESS THEM, LEAD THEM AROUND WHERE THEY DO NOT WANT TO GO, MAKE THEM LIVE WHERE THEY DO NOT WANT TO LIVE, TELL THEM WHEN TO EAT AND WHAT TO EAT, MAKE THEIR SCHEDULE FOR THEM, WHETHER THEY LIKE IT OR NOT. THEY LOSE ALL THEIR FREEDOM, DIGNITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVEN THE MOST PERSONAL AND INTIMATE THINGS IN THEIR OWN LIFE. OF COURSE A VERY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF ELDERLY PEOPLE BECOME INCOMPETENT AND NEED TOTAL CARE, AND FOR SOME OF THESE PERHAPS THIS CAN BEST BE PROVIDED BY PROFESSIONALS IN AN INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT, BUT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY--PERHAPS 95% TO 98%--DO NOT NEED THIS KIND OF INSTITUTIONAL LIFE. IT WOULD BE HIGHLY UNKIND AND UNJUST TO TAKE THEM AWAY FROM THEIR FAMILY, FRIENDS, CHURCH, AND COMMUNITY, AND PLACE THEM IN SUCH AN IMPERSONAL REGIMENTED ENVIRONMENT WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT.

F. THERE CAN BE NO RESPECT WITHOUT LOVE. DR. PAUL TOURNIER, THE GREAT SWISS CHRISTIAN WRITER, DOCTOR, AND PSYCHOLOGIST, SAID, "I HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS ONE ESSENTIAL, PROFOUND, UNDERLYING PROBLEM, AND IT IS THAT THE OLD ARE UNLOVED. THEY DO NOT FEEL THEMSELVES TO BE LOVED, AND TOO MANY PEOPLE TREAT THEM WITH INDIFFERENCE AND SEEK NO CONTACT WITH THEM (P. 63, LEARN TO GROW OLD).

G. THERE IS AN OLD AMERICAN FOLK TALE ABOUT A WOODEN BOWL. IT SEEMS THAT GRANDMOTHER, WITH HER TREMBLING HANDS, WAS GUILTY OF OCCASIONALLY BREAKING A DISH. HER DAUGHTER ANGRILY GAVE HER A WOODEN BOWL, AND TOLD HER THAT SHE MUST EAT OUT OF IT FROM NOW ON. THE YOUNG GRANDDAUGHTER, OBSERVING THIS, ASKED HER MOTHER WHY GRANDMOTHER MUST EAT FROM A WOODEN BOWL WHEN THE REST OF THE FAMILY WAS GIVEN CHINA PLATES. "BECAUSE SHE IS OLD!" ANSWERED HER MOTHER.

THE CHILD THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT AND THEN TOLD HER MOTHER, "YOU MUST SAVE THE WOODEN BOWL WHEN GRANDMA DIES." HER MOTHER ASKED WHY, AND THE CHILD REPLIED, "FOR WHEN YOU ARE OLD." (PP. 196-97)

YOU MUST BE VERY CAREFUL WHEN SPEAKING WITH ANY CONTEMPT FOR THE ELDERLY, FOR YOU ARE REALLY SPEAKING OF YOUR FUTURE SELF.

III. CALEB ASKS FOR MORE MOUNTAINS OF HOPE AND FULFILLMENT.

A. CALEB WANTED TO KEEP A FUTURE ORIENTATION.

"AT EIGHTY," ARCHIBALD MCLEISH, THE POET, DECLARED, "YOU HAVE TO BEGIN TO LOOK AHEAD."

CHRISTIANS MUST ALWAYS LOOK AHEAD, NOT BACKWARDS.

B. CALEB HAD NO PLACE IN HIS LIFE FOR PESSIMISM AND DESPAIR.

THE ATTITUDE OF PESSIMISM IS NON-CHRISTIAN, AND DESPAIR IS ANTI-CHRISTIAN. THE CHRISTIAN SEES EVIL IN THE WORLD, BUT WE KNOW THAT OUR HEAVENLY FATHER WILL HAVE THE LAST WORD WITH THIS EVIL WORLD SYSTEM, AND HIS WILL MUST PREVAIL. THEREFORE, WE KEEP OUR HOPE AND OPTIMISM.

C. OLD AGE IS A GOOD TIME, IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE SO BEFORE, TO DISCOVER THE MEANING OF LIFE AND PHYSICAL DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE. IT IS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR FAITH.

BUT IT IS NOT THE BEST TIME TO PREPARE TO DIE. THE BEST TIME TO PREPARE TO DIE IS WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG, EITHER AN ADOLESCENT OR A YOUNG ADULT, FOR PREPARATION FOR DEATH IS BASICALLY PREPARATION FOR THE MOST MEANINGFUL AND FULFILLING LIFE POSSIBLE ON EARTH AS WELL AS IN HEAVEN.

D. DR. PAUL TOURNIER CONFESSED THAT HE HAD SOME DIFFICULTY WITH THE IDEA THAT THE MEANING OF OLD AGE IS "TO PREPARE FOR DEATH AND FOR MEETING GOD, OR TO DETACH US FROM THE THINGS OF THE WORLD IN ORDER TO ATTACH US TO THOSE OF HEAVEN" (P. 190). HE CONFESSED THAT HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT MEANS-- TO PREPARE ONESELF FOR DEATH. HE WROTE, "I DOUBT IF I SHOULD EVER BE READY, ESPECIALLY IF I CONCERNED MYSELF HENCEFORTH ONLY WITH PREPARING MYSELF FOR IT. DEATH WILL COME FOR ME JUST AS I AM, AND WHAT HAPPENS TO ME WILL DEPEND EXCLUSIVELY, AS IT WILL WITH ALL OTHER MEM...ON GOD'S MERCY, AND NOT ON MY PREPARATION, HOWEVER SINCERE IT MAY BE." DR. TOURNIER BELIEVED THAT "THE WHOLE OF LIFE...IS A PREPARATION FOR DEATH," NOT JUST THE LAST FEW MONTHS OR YEARS. ANOTHER REASON WHY DR. TOURNIER WAS TROUBLED WITH THIS PIETISTIC VIEW OF DETACHMENT FROM THE WORLD WAS THAT HE BELIEVED, AS I DO, THAT GOD MADE THIS WORLD AND PUT US IN IT, AND FOR THIS REASON IT IS NOT WRONG FOR US TO BE INTERESTED IN IT RIGHT UP TO THE END, NO LESS THAN WE WERE WHEN WE WERE YOUNGER. WE CAN AND SHOULD KNOW GOD AND LIVE FOR HIM FOR OUR YOUTH, AND THAT IS THE BEST PREPARATION FOR LIFE AND FOR OLD AGE.

E. BUT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CONSIDER SERIOUSLY AND PROFOUNDLY THE CONDITION OF OLD AGE WITHOUT CONSIDERING AT THE SAME TIME DEATH, AND ITS MEANING IN THE CHRISTIAN SCHEME OF THINGS. FOR THE CHRISTIAN, DEATH IS NOT SO MUCH A TERMINATION, HOWEVER, AS IT IS A TRANSITION TO A HIGHER LIFE. REMEMBER THAT THE BIBLE TEACHES THE FOLLOWING:

1. DEATH WAS NOT IN THE ORIGINAL PLAN OF GOD. DEATH IS AN INTRUDER, AND IT WILL ONE DAY BE CONQUERED. IT ALREADY HAS BEEN, IN FACT, THROUGH THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST.

2. DEATH COULD NOT HOLD OUR SAVIOR, BECAUSE OF HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. BECAUSE HE LIVES, WE TOO SHALL LIVE. WE TOO SHALL RISE AGAIN.

3. DEATH FOR THE CHRISTIAN IS NOT TO BE FEARED. DEATH AFFECTS ONLY THE MORTAL BODY, WHICH WOULD DECAY CONTINUOUSLY AND PROGRESSIVELY ANYWAY WERE IT NOT FOR THE MERCIFUL INTERVENTION OF DEATH IN OUR MORTALITY.

4. DEATH AFFECTS THE SPIRIT NOT AT ALL, AND IT AFFECTS THE BODY ONLY IN ITS MORTALITY. THE SOUL OR SPIRIT, REDEEMED BY JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOR, GOES IMMEDIATELY TO BE WITH HIM IN PARADISE AT THE TIME OF DEATH, WHEN IT IS SEPARATED FROM THE BODY. THIS SOUL OR SPIRIT WILL SOME DAY REJOIN A RESURRECTED AND GLORIFIED SPIRITUAL BODY, IN WHICH STATE WE SHALL BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE ONE ANOTHER IN HEAVEN. CHRISTIAN RESURRECTION IS MUCH MORE THAN THE GREEK IDEA OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL; IT IS THE IMMORTALITY OF THE WHOLE PERSON, THE RECOGNIZABLE SELF, INCLUDING SOUL AND RESURRECTED, GLORIFIED, SPIRITUAL BODY, FREED FROM ALL DISEASES, PAIN, SUFFERING, SIN, HUNGER, WANT, AND ALL MORTAL LIMITATIONS. DO YOU GET THE PICTURE? CHRISTIAN IMMORTALITY AND ETERNAL LIFE ARE REVEALED THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, AS WE READ IN 2ND TIM. 1:10. THIS IS THE REAL BASIS OF OUR CHRISTIAN HOPE AND THE FULFILLMENT OF ALL OUR FONDEST DREAMS.

F. TO TRADE IN OUR OLD WORN OUT PHYSICAL BODY, WITH ITS WRINKLES, WEAKNESS, DISEASES, DEBILITATION, DISINTEGRATION, AND SO FORTH, FOR SUCH A GLORIFIED, RESURRECTED BODY, LIKE UNTO HIS GLORIOUS BODY, A SPIRITUAL, BUT NEVERTHELESS VERY REAL RECOGNIZABLE BODY OF OUR REDEEMED SELF, PERFECT IN EVERY WAY,--I WOULD CALL THAT A VERY GOOD TRADE INDEED!

G. ANOTHER WORD FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL IS IN ORDER HERE: "THOUGH THE OUTER MAN OF OURS MAY BE FALLING INTO DECAY, THE INNER MAN IS RENEWED DAY BY DAY," (2ND COR. 4:16). THAT IS AN APPROPRIATE MESSAGE FOR SENIOR ADULTS TODAY.

THERE IS A PART OF US, OUR PHYSICAL STRENGTH, WHICH DETERIORATES, AND THIS MUST BE ACCEPTED. PAUL THE AGED MISSIONARY VETERAN FAITHFUL TO HIS LAST DAYS, SAYS HIS "INNER MAN" IS RENEWED DAY BY DAY, AND HE KEEPS REACHING OUT FOR THAT WHICH LIES AHEAD, AND PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL TO WIN THE PRIZE, WHICH IS GOD'S CALL TO THE LIFE ABOVE, IN CHRIST JESUS" (PHIL. 3:13, NEB).

IS THERE SOMETHING WITHIN WHICH TRANSCENDS DEATH? "IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?" THE BIBLE SAYS, "YES." JESUS CHRIST SAYS, "YES." THE CHRISTIAN SAYS, "YES." OLD AGE DOES HAVE MEANING; WE CAN LIVE THROUGH IT IN CONFIDENCE, BECAUSE WE ARE ON OUR WAY TO AN ETERNAL DESTINATION BEYOND DEATH.

THIS IS FAITH'S FINAL MOUNTAIN TO BE CLIMBED AND CONQUERED.

CONCLUSION

CHRISTIANS DO NOT FEAR THE CHALLENGES OF OLD AGE. RATHER, WE ACCEPT THEM AND LOOK FORWARD TO THEM BECAUSE OF THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD AND THE HOPE OF WHAT IS BEYOND. CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS ASK ONLY THAT OTHER CHRISTIANS, LOVED ONES, AND OUR ENTIRE SOCIETY AS FAR AS POSSIBLE GIVE THEM THE RESPECT AND DIGNITY WHICH OUR NEAR EASTERN SCRIPTURES AFFORD THE ELDERLY, AND ALLOW OUR SENIOR ADULTS TO EXPERIENCE THE HOPE AND FULFILLMENT WHICH THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH ASSURES THEM.

WE SALUTE YOU AS YOU SAY WITH CALEB, "GIVE US THESE MOUNTAINS WHICH THE LORD SPOKE TO US ABOUT IN AN EARLIER DAY!"

5-1-88 Azalea B.C. St. Pete (Ss. Adult Day)

The Spirit of Caleb

He stood before Joshua with flashing eye,
"Give me my mountain, before I die,

"But Caleb, you're old and the mountain's
high;
Take a peaceful spot on this plain to die.

"The people who live on the mountain are
strong;
And the battle you'll find to be bloody and
long."

His eyes never wavered as he spoke without
fears,
"I've been promised that mountain for
forty-five years.

"And as for the people being mighty and
tall;
The bigger they are, the harder they fall!

"For it's not my strength on which I am
counting,
It's the Lord who's going to take that
mountain.

"So let's quit talking while it's still light,
For the Lord and I have a battle to fight!"

and so it was