

The Inheritance of God
Joshua 15:13-19

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life has made me free from the law of sin and death.” That’s the good news: we are saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There is nothing we have to do to be saved, and there’s no work we can accomplish that can save us.

That’s all true. And the fancy theological word for that wonderful news is justification, which means being declared righteous in the sight of God. And that’s exactly what God has done for all who trust in Christ. The amazing truth is that when God looks at us, He doesn’t see all our sin – instead He sees the perfect holiness of Jesus. That free gift – the very righteousness of Christ – is the inheritance that God gives to all of His people.

But God hasn’t just declared us not guilty and then sent us on our way. No, as Paul told us in our responsive reading from Romans chapter 8, God has given us the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of Christ. And in this way, God has made us part of His family – He has adopted us as sons and daughters. And that means, as Paul tells us, we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

And so, just like Caleb, we have an inheritance. Verse 13 tells us that Caleb was allotted the city of Arba, which in later years was called Hebron. And last week we learned why Caleb received this particular part of the Promised Land – it’s the place he and the rest of the spies had investigated 45 years earlier. Only he and Joshua had brought back a good report of that place, so God said that Caleb would receive it as his inheritance – a place where he could live in the presence of God and God’s people.

And just as God declared Hebron to be Caleb’s inheritance, God has given justification and adoption to all who trust in Christ as Savior and bow the knee to Him as Lord, declaring us worthy to live in the presence of God’s and God’s people. But Caleb was not satisfied simply to have his inheritance assigned to him. No, Caleb had to move from verse 13 to verse 14, from the declaration that he had an inheritance to the actual possession of it.

In the same way, God has justified all who trust in Christ, declaring us righteous and holy in His sight. God has declared that we belong to Him, that we are His children. But we also must act to possess that holiness. We must act to make that righteousness a reality in our lives. We must live as the children of God He has made us. And that process of becoming what God has already declared us to be, that process of becoming more and more holy and righteous, more and more like Jesus has another fancy theological label – it’s called sanctification.

And just as Caleb had to fight to possess his inheritance, sanctification is hard work. Verse 14 tells us that Caleb had to defeat three sons of Anak, and from other places in the Bible we understand that these were giants. Now, think about that. David only had to face one giant, Goliath, but Caleb had to face three: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi. Now, he probably had some other folks in his family and clan to help him, but let’s face it – slaying giants is never easy.

And taking up our inheritance isn’t any easier for us, for sanctification is a long, hard process. Now, to be sure, we don’t all face the same giants. There’s not some simple legalistic list of rules that

everyone has to follow: “Don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t chew and don’t go with girls who do.” What might be sinful for us might be okay for others, and vice versa. But make no mistake: bowing the knee to King Jesus always requires making tough choices, making the decision to devote more and more of our time, talent and treasure to His glory and the good of others instead of our own pleasure or benefit.

So, what might growing in sanctification look like for you? Some of us might need to spend less time playing computer games or reading internet articles or watching TV so we can spend more time with our families and friends or more time with God in prayer and Bible study. Others might need to spend less money at the mall (or shopping online) so they can give more financial help to needy family members or friends or missionaries or church planters. Still others might need to struggle against harmful habits or even dangerous addictions. There are all sorts of ways, big and small, momentous and mundane, in which we all need to put sin to death in our lives each and every day.

And the people in today’s passage also had a variety of difficulties, didn’t they? Yes, Caleb fought the giants in verse 13. And in verse 17, his nephew Othniel had to fight against the inhabitants of Kiriath-sepher. It’s all so heroic. It’s all so dramatic.

But the gentle, insistent pressure Achsah supplied in verses 18 and 19 was just as important in improving the inheritance she and Othniel received. For what good is a city without fields and pastures around it? And in the dry, southern part of the Promised Land, what good were fields and pastures without wells of water? Achsah’s encouragement of her husband to ask for more land and her own persistence in asking for water rights ended up being just as important as Othniel’s courage and bravery in securing the blessings of their inheritance.

And the same thing is true for us. For sanctification is not a sprint – it’s a marathon. Yesterday I was blessed to witness the wedding of Abigail Fraley and John Self, both of whom grew up in this church. During the service, they were reminded that marriage involves the daily, hourly, minute-by-minute decision to put each other’s needs ahead of their own. In the same way, sanctification is the daily, hourly, minute-by-minute decision to turn away from our own desires and to live instead for God’s glory and for the good of others. That’s the way we live into our inheritance. That’s the way we become more righteous and more holy and more like Jesus: step by step, choice by choice.

And just as we must pursue sanctification with steady regularity, we must never be satisfied with the progress that we have made. For no matter how long we may have followed Jesus, no matter how many people we may have helped, no matter how many bad habits we may have overcome and no matter how many idols we may have rejected, there are always more challenges to face.

In fact, the challenges tend to get harder the longer you live, right? College courses are harder than those in high school. Marriage is harder than dating. Being a foreman involves more responsibility than working on an assembly line. Moreover, with the passing of each year, we have more aches and pains and less energy to face them. We go to more and more funerals. So, with each new challenge comes a greater need for trust in Christ. As we face our helplessness in more and more areas of our lives, we need more of His righteousness, holiness, humility, and love to keep going, to keep growing closer to Him, to keep following Him.

In the same way, Caleb wasn’t satisfied with the inheritance initially allotted to him. Yes, in verse 15 he fought the giants and conquered Hebron. But then he decided to go about 7 miles away and

take control of yet another city, a place called Debir. He kept on pushing the boundary, trying to bring more and more of the Promised Land into subjection to God, just as we need to bring more and more areas of our lives into line with God's will each and every day.

But even Caleb eventually reached his limits, and that brings us to the next important aspect of sanctification. For if we must put the deeds of the flesh to death, no matter where we may find them, and if we must persevere in our efforts to be more like Christ each and every day, we can't fight this fight alone – we need each other for encouragement and help. You know, it isn't just addicts who need support groups. We all need Teaching Elders to hold God's Word before us and help us understand what it means. We all need Ruling Elders to hold us accountable for our professions of faith. We all need deacons to challenge how we use our time, talent, and treasure. We all need Christian friends to give us a listening ear and sometimes a challenging word.

And we see the same kind of mutual assistance at work in today's passage, don't we? Othniel needed Achsah to prod him to ask for more land, and to pay attention to important details. Just so, Caleb needed Othniel's youth and strength and energy to help him complete the conquest of Debir. And to inspire Othniel to greater faithfulness, Caleb promised him his daughter Achsah. And to help the young couple get started, Caleb gave them land and water rights. Caleb thus passed the torch to the next generation by giving them the help they needed.

And didn't Jesus do the same sort of thing for us? After all, He didn't continue His earthly ministry forever. Instead, when He ascended into Heaven, He gave His Holy Spirit to all those who trust in Him. And He called us to do what He did for us, to make disciples by teaching others to believe and observe all that He told us. In other words, an essential part of following Christ is passing the torch, encouraging others to follow Him, and giving them the help they need.

But we can't urge others to follow Christ unless we ourselves are following Him. Sure, He has justified us as a free gift. He has saved all who trust in Him by His free grace alone. But unless we get serious about our own sanctification, how can we expect anyone else to want to be saved? Unless we are surrendering more and more areas of our lives to His authority, unless we are devoting more of ourselves to His glory each and every day, unless we are putting to death the deeds of our selfish nature and are walking more and more in the light and truth of the Spirit, in short, unless we are living like Jesus, why should we expect anyone else to believe what we say about Him?

So, I suppose we can give into complacency, sitting back on our blessed assurance and pretending that there's nothing we need to do for God. But that's not really following Jesus, is it? No, the only way to live into our justification, the only way to take up our inheritance is to give ourselves more and more completely to the One Who gave Himself completely to us, to surrender more and more of our lives to the King of Kings.