

Facing the Future with Faith, Not Fear

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is from Joshua chapter 14, verse 5. The people of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses, and they adlauded the land.

Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the Kenesai. You know what the Lord said to Moses, the man of God, in Kadesh Bania, concerning you and me.

I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me from Kadesh Bania to spy out the land. And I brought him word again, as it was in my heart.

But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt. Yet I wholly followed the Lord my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely, the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.

And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness.

[1 : 16] And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me. My strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming.

So now, give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day. For you heard on that day how the Anakins were there with great fortified cities.

It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said. Then Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb, the son of Jephthah, for an inheritance.

Therefore, Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb, the son of Jephthah the Canazite, to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you, Margo. Let's pray together as we come to God's word. Father, I know we say this every week, but we say it because we believe it, and it's true.

[2 : 18] We want you to speak to us. God, the most important part of this morning is not my opinions or anybody else's opinions. It's what your word says.

God, your word is life. Your word is truth. Your word is good for us. Your word edifies and builds us up. God, we want your word to speak to us. We want you, the living God, to speak to us through your word.

And God, we want you to speak to us as a congregation, as a church today. You're not merely interested in learning about history. We want to know how can we as a church follow you wholeheartedly in this season.

And so God, I pray, won't you by your spirit, let your spirit and your word work together and speak to our hearts and speak to us as a congregation. We pray these things in your great and wonderful name.

Amen. Amen. Okay, here's a question. If I had a AI machine here, let's call it an AI crystal ball, okay, that could predict the future and tell you everything you needed to know about the future.

[3 : 22] Here's my question. What three questions would you ask this AI machine? Okay. In other words, what is it about the future that you wish you knew or could predict or have certainty on?

And maybe one of your questions would be something like, maybe you'd want to know about financial security. What's going to happen when I retire? Maybe you want to know about relationships. Is this relationship going to work out?

Is it not? Does that person like me? Maybe you want to know about your career. What would you want to know? Or here's another way of asking the question.

What area of life do you have very little control over that you wish you could control? Okay. Hold that question in your mind.

This morning we are doing a standalone series or standalone sermon. Often we work through series and in two weeks time we are going to work through the book of 1 Corinthians. We are going to start that for a couple of weeks.

[4 : 25] But this Sunday and next Sunday we are going to do two standalone sermons. And this morning is going to be a little bit different because often our sermon series are quite personal and individualistic in a way.

It's what does it mean for you to follow God? For me to trust Jesus this week. But today what I want to do is to step back and to speak to us as a congregation and say what does God want to say to us as a church body?

So it's going to be a little bit more corporate. And so maybe to ask that question is if we as a church family could ask God for three guarantees, what would we ask him for?

The reason I ask us these questions is because if you haven't worked out, at Watermark we are in an interesting season. A season of flux, a season of change, a season of uncertainty.

There's lots that's going on at the moment that we can't control. So here's one thing. Many of you will know we are looking for a new venue. And we have identified the western part of Hong Kong, kind of Kenney townish area.

[5 : 25] And we found a venue that we like. And we've raised some money. And we want to go talk to the landlord. But we have no control over how that's going to work out. Maybe the landlord doesn't like us.

Maybe the landlord likes us but we can't afford what he wants. Maybe some people in the church like it and some people don't. And there's so much uncertainty about it.

Maybe the whole thing falls flat and we are back to square one and we've got to start all over again. So who knows how that whole thing is going to work out. Or maybe it works out amazingly. And we all move in and we love it and it's fantastic.

And the church grows. And then there are all sorts of new people that we hadn't anticipated. And maybe the church feels like, I used to know everybody but now the church has grown too big.

Now I don't know everybody. This used to be my family but now I feel like a stranger here. Or maybe we need to go to two services. And then we feel like our church doesn't have the same feel that it used to.

[6 : 24] Or maybe we attract a new demographic. We are a young church already. Maybe a whole lot more students come and we become even younger. Or maybe there's an elderly home next door and we become older.

The point is hundreds of reasons. There are an infinite number of things about the future that we have very little control over and we can't predict. Here's another thing. Now we've recently started on Sunday afternoons a service in Syingpun at 2.30 in our community center.

The last two weeks have been so much fun. It's been really great. I've really loved it. But that too has a whole lot of unknowns and uncertainty. Is this venture going to work out? Maybe in six months time the whole thing collapses and nobody comes and it is a failure.

Maybe a whole lot of people do come and it explodes with growth and it's big and now we've got two churches on our hands. And none of us know how to lead two churches at the same time.

Maybe we move to Kennedy Town six months time. And then what do we do with that? Who knows? The point is it's a step of faith but there's a lot of uncertainty. A lot of challenges.

[7 : 32] There's a lot of change in the air. Here's a third thing that an area of change. As a church we've been talking with some of the leaders. Maybe we haven't spoken about that much here.

But as a church one of the things about Watermark is we're a tight community. We're a tight family. We value community. We're not amazingly good at outreach and evangelism and mission.

And part of the reason for that is it's a little bit uncomfortable. It's so nice knowing everybody and being a tight community and being inward looking and comfortable. But when you're going to step out and invite people it can sometimes be a bit hard.

And it can be uncomfortable. And it can be full of changes. And so once again as we think about how do we as a church we love the gospel. We love community but mission we've got to grow in that.

We've got to get better. We want to reach out to people. Oh well there's a whole lot of changes there. And it's uncomfortable. And it's difficult. And how's that going to work? And what happens if I invite my neighbor to the explore course and he laughs in my face?

[8 : 33] Or what happens if I tell my boss I'm a Christian and that has career limiting implications for me? Or what happens if what will people think of me when I invite them to church? Or I want to ask them to read the Bible with me?

As we want to grow and be obedient to Jesus there's a whole lot of changes and implications and challenges and unknown and uncertainty. So here's the question. What do we do with that?

And how do we respond to that? What is our attitude that we take to this season that we're in? How are we going to face the future? And how can we be a church community which faces the uncertainty of the future with faith not fear?

That's the question I want us to think about. Okay. And so let's look at this passage in Joshua 14. Now again long introduction. In order to understand Joshua 14 we need to understand there's a story in the background from Numbers 13 and 14.

Okay. So let me run through that story briefly. The story is this. You remember if you've been part of Watermark for a while. A major theme in the Old Testament is how the people of God leave Egypt.

[9 : 39] God saves them the exodus by the blood of the lamb. They're rescued and they're on their way to the promised land to Canaan. And so God tells Moses that there'll be slaves in Egypt for 400 years and then they will go to Canaan.

Which is the land that God originally promised Abraham. That's why it's called the promised land. Okay. In between Egypt and Canaan there's a wilderness period. And so the Israelites leave Egypt and they're in the wilderness and they want to work out how do we get into the promised land.

And so Moses takes 12 spies or 12 leaders one from each tribe and he sends them into Canaan and he says you go and spy out the land. Go and tell us what it's like and bring back wood.

Bring back some of the produce, the agriculture. Tell us which way should we go. Should we go this way? Should we go that way? Where should we settle? What are the cities like? Are they strong? Are they fortified?

Do they have armies? Which cities do we need to defeat? Which ones do we need to avoid? Come and bring back wood. And so the 12 spies go off for 40 days. They're walking around the promised land.

[10 : 42] They bring back some of the produce. And they bring back a report. And so look at what happens here. This is Numbers 13. The spies come back and they say, When we came to the land of which you sent us, Moses, it flows with milk and honey and this is the fruit.

In other words, it looks really promising. This is looking good. So on this point they're united. But that's about as far as they get. Because the next verse is, verse 28. 10 out of the 12 spies continue.

However, the people who dwell in the land are strong. And the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of the Anak there. The Anak were big giants.

Like very big people, right? And the Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negev. And the Hittites and the Jebusites and all these people dwell in the hill country. The Canaanites also dwell there along the Jordan.

In other words, there are people there. And they're strong. And it's scary. And we're going to have to fight them. This is going to be a battle, not a picnic, they're saying. Okay?

[11 : 45] Look at what else they say. Verse 31. And they said, We are not able to go up against these people. For they are stronger than we are. The land through which we've gone to spite out is a land that devils its inhabitants.

And all the people we saw there are of great height. We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers. Grasshoppers. And so we seemed to them. Okay? So Moses sends them out and says, tell us about the future.

And how do they respond? There's not much faith going on. There's fear. There's uncertainty. They're responding with a sense of trepidation.

Not of faith in the goodness of God. And because of their fear, fear spreads out throughout the whole nation. And everyone says, okay, that's enough. Let's go back to Egypt. This is a bad idea.

But the two spies, one's called Joshua, one's called Caleb. And they have a different idea. They saw the same land, same people, same circumstances. But they approach it differently. Look at what they say. Verse 30.

[12 : 44] But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, that's enough. Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it. For the land which we pass through to spy is an exceedingly good land.

And if the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us. A land that flows with milk and honey. So don't rebel against the Lord. Do not fear the people of the land.

They are like bread to us. Their protection is removed. And the Lord is with us. Do not fear them. Okay, so Caleb and Joshua say, no, we can do it.

God is with us. Let's go. But the negativity of the ten spies overwhelms Caleb and Joshua's report. And so the people say, that's enough. We're not going to go in. And so they refuse to go into the land that God is leading them in.

And for 40 years, they wander in the wilderness. Until that entire generation has died off. And the next generation has risen up. But God makes a promise to Caleb. He says, Caleb, because you trusted me, I'll keep you alive.

[13 : 47] You and Joshua will go into the promised land. And there's a portion of land I will give to your families as an inheritance. Okay? So that's the story in Numbers 13 and 14. In Joshua 14, which Margot read to us, and which is in your bulletins.

It's now 45 years later. And Caleb, they're about to go into the promised land. All of the next generation. And Caleb is reminding Joshua, saying, remember what Moses said. That God has set aside a piece of land for me.

Okay? And so, look at what Caleb's words are. Look at verse 8. Look in your bulletin. He says, And so, Joshua, now he's taken over from Moses.

He agrees with Caleb's recollection. And he gives this area called Hebron to Caleb's family. Look at verse 13. He says, So Joshua blessed him and gave Hebron to Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, for inheritance.

Therefore, Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord his God, the God of Israel. Okay? So that's kind of what's going on in this passage, that Caleb is saying, remember the word.

[15 : 07] I'm going to go up, give me that land, and let's go. Now, the question is this. Okay. Wonderful. What does that mean for us today in Hong Kong, 21st century?

I mean, hello? What does that mean for us? Okay. Three lessons I think that we can take from this for us as a church in this season of our life. Okay?

First one is this. Let's be those who wholly follow the Lord. Okay? Watermark. Let's be a church that wholly follows the Lord. I'm not sure if you noticed it, but if you didn't, look in your bulletin.

Three times, Caleb is described as a man who wholly follows the Lord. Look at the end of verse 8, and verse 9, and verse 14.

Right? And not only is this Caleb's assessment of himself, this is what Joshua also says in verse 14. For he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel. But not only that, this is actually something that God says about Caleb.

[16 : 06] Back in Numbers 14, God says, None of those who despise me will enter the promised land. And then he says, Except my servant Caleb, I will bring him into the land, which he went, and his descendants, because he has a different spirit.

I've often thought about that over the years. God says, there's something different about Caleb. He saw the same data, the same facts, same circumstances, but there's something about his heart, about his spirit, that was different from everybody else.

He said, it's going to be hard. I don't know how it's going to work, but God is with us. We can do it. Everybody else saw the same data and said, we can't do it. Something different about Caleb.

He has a different spirit. He has fully followed me. Okay, so what does that mean? What does it mean for us to be people that fully follow the Lord?

Well, the contrast obviously is with somebody who partially follows the Lord, right? I mean, that's the contrast. Fully versus partially. What does it mean to be partially devoted to the Lord? Especially in uncertain times.

[17 : 10] What it means is that it's one thing to follow God when everything is predictable, easy, and laid out for you. But when things are uncertain, when there's change or challenge or uncomfortable, to partially follow the Lord, to not fully follow the Lord, is to pull back and say, we can't do it.

In other words, to fully follow the Lord means God in good seasons and bad seasons, I think Nate sang it earlier, in winter and in summertime, to know that you are faithful. Great is your faithfulness, whether in valleys low or mountains high.

God, to fully follow you and say, I will trust you no matter what the season or the circumstances. It's one thing to say, God, I trust you. But when difficulty comes or change comes, challenge comes, say, actually, no, wait, I think we'll retreat.

But Caleb is somebody who says, God, we don't know how it's going to work out. But my hope is fully in the Lord. We'll go for it. If God has said, we know, we don't know how it's going to work out, but we'll know he'll make a way.

Notice the words of the ten spies in Numbers 13. I think we got on the slide. They said, we are not able to go up against the people. They are stronger than we are.

[18 : 26] And the land is a land that devours its inhabitants. The people of a great height. We seem like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them. And verse 3, why is the Lord bringing us into this land?

To fall by the sword. Our wives and our little ones will become prey. See what's happening here? They're projecting onto the future their picture of how the future is going to work. So they say, this is what could possibly happen.

And now they say, this is what will happen. Yeah, it's possible. They're going to have some battles. That's true. Now they say, no, this is how it's going to work out. Our children are going to die. Our wives are going to be killed.

This is the worst possible scenario. They take that for themselves. Friends, it's easy to be people of faith when everything is plain sailing and predictable.

When there's nothing uncertain. When there's no challenges and no change. When we know exactly how the future is going to roll. It's easy to follow Jesus. But what happens when the future is as clear as mud, as my dad would say?

[19 : 27] In other words, not very clear at all. Right? Will we still be wholly devoted to the Lord? Paul Tripp writes this.

I just forgot his name. Paul Tripp writes this. He says, You can be very mature in your understanding of theology. Even things like God's sovereignty. And yet still live your life full of fear.

Because in your immaturity, you've attached your security more to your control than to God's wise rule. But faith is more than what you simply know with your brains.

Ultimately, faith is an investment of your heart that leads to a radically new and different way of living. And so friends, the future is, of course it's uncertain. That's the whole point, right? Of course it's unknown.

The future is full of obstacles and challenges and reasons to be fearful. And friends, the future of Watermark is no way guaranteed to be easy or plain sailing. And yet, and yet, we have every reason to be full of faith.

[20 : 29] Because there is a God in heaven who is sovereign and in control of everything. And he says, Trust me. Trust me. Don't trust this AI machine. Trust me. Okay.

Friends, what might it look like for us as a church to be wholly devoted to the Lord in this season? Okay. So first thing, let's be a church that's wholly devoted to the Lord. Second thing, let's be those who trust God for the long run.

One of the things I love about this passage in Joshua 14 is the time frames and the ages that are given. Right? Look at what Caleb says. Verse 7. I was 40 years old.

Wow, what a great age. I've just turned 40 a few weeks ago. Okay? Caleb says, I was 40 years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me to spy out the land. By the way, I'm not spying out any land.

This is the promised land, Hong Kong. We are staying right here. And verse 10. And now, behold, I am this day 85 years old. No comments. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me.

[21 : 30] My strength now is as my strength was then. So give me this heel country of which the Lord has spoken. Now, there's two things I love about this. First one is this. Caleb's 85 years old.

And he is still full of faith. And he's raring to go and he's not slowing down. What a great example. I want to be like Caleb when I'm 85 years old. Okay?

What a great example. But the other thing, what's even more impressive, is how his faith has remained these 45 years. It hasn't abated. He hasn't become jaded and cynical and hard.

His life has given him knocks. At 40 years old, he's full of faith. We can do it. Let's go. 45 years later, he is just as full of faith. Let's go. God is with us.

Now, there's two implications of this for us. First is this. Watermark is a fairly young church. We don't look as young today because all our young people are away. Okay?

[22 : 27] But we're a very young church. 70% of our congregations between the age of 20 and 40. 35% are in their 20s alone. Here's my thing.

If you're young, I'm so glad you're here. If you're in your 20s, my heart is so happy that you're in your 20s. And if you're here. But let me say this. It's easy to follow God wholeheartedly and passionately when you don't have kids and you don't have responsibilities and you don't have a manager in the office and you've got a lot more time in your hands.

And it's easy when all your other friends are passionate and life is good and the future is brimming with hope and confidence. But my question is this. Can you guys still be as passionate, as full of faith, as convinced of God's goodness in 40 and 50 and 60 years time?

That when you're in your 80s, you're still saying, God's got a good future for us. Let's trust Him. Let's not be a church that is passionate and exciting and young when you're in our 20s and 30s and then get jaded and cynical and become mediocre and average when you get older.

Here's the other implication. We need gray-haired granddads and grandmoms. We need you. And the church really needs you. We need you to show us how to consistently and wholeheartedly follow the Lord for the decades.

[23 : 56] Where are young people going to learn what does it look like to follow God for 30 and 40 years if you aren't in our life? And so one of the temptations in church that's got a lot of young people is that when you get 50 plus, the church kind of moves you aside and says, thanks, we don't need you that much anymore.

That cannot happen. You're not just making up numbers. We need those that are more experienced and wiser. And I don't think we have any 80-year-olds in our church. But if you're in your 50s, I know, or even 60s, the world kind of says, okay, you're on your way out.

In God's kingdom, you're only just hitting your prime. That's the best time. It really is. It really is. And so I just want to say this church needs you. We need your wisdom. We need your maturity.

Robin, we need you. Don't go anywhere back to South Africa. We need you. We need your wisdom. We need your maturity. But more than anything else, in times of uncertainty and when things are changing and there's lots of unknowns in the air, we need you to remind us youngsters or other youngsters.

I'm now 40. We need you to remind us what it means that God is faithful. We need you to show us, hold on to him. Don't worry. We've been around this mountain. Don't lose your head.

[25 : 07] Let's be a church that trusts God for the long haul. Finally, last thing. Let's be those who know that God is with us. Now, here's the question I want us to ask as we close. Is there's something else from Caleb's life I want us to see.

What gave Caleb such confidence? Was he just an optimistic kind of guy? Someone who always sees the glass half full? Well, look at verse 12 with me. Caleb says this.

He says, So now, give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke to me on that day, for it may be the Lord will be with me, and I will drive them out just as the Lord has said.

Okay? So Caleb says, Joshua, give me the hill country. I'm feeling good. I'm feeling strong. I'm sure the Lord is with me. I can go. Do you remember 45 years earlier?

What did Caleb say back in Numbers 14? Verse 8, he says, If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into the land and give it to us. So do not rebel against him. Do not fear the people.

[26 : 07] Their protection is removed, and the Lord is with us. So do not be afraid. Friends, what was Caleb's confidence? Where did he get this assurance that the future is uncertain, but it's going to be good?

The Lord is with us. The Lord is with us. That's his confidence. See, what more do we need?

What other assurance do we need? Where else are we going to look to? If we look to our leaders and say, okay, we've got great leaders. We've got Oscar. We've got Dan. We've got Simon. We've got Neil.

We've got great leaders. Okay, our future is certain. Sorry, guys. That's a very, very shaky future. If we look at our bank accounts, okay, we've got reserves. There's generous people.

Okay, we've got to be fine in the future. No, no, no. We're not going to be fine. That is disastrous. The only assurance and security we have is not something that's found inside of us.

[27 : 10] It's found in who he is. He is the sovereign God. And he is with us. The Lord is with us. The Lord there is written in capital letters, which means it's God's name that he gives himself.

Yahweh. The self-sustaining, uncreated, eternally existed God that holds the entire universe in the palm of his hand. And this God that brought galaxies and solar systems and all sorts of things I don't understand into being.

This God says, I am with you. And I will not leave you. And I will not abandon you. And I will not forsake you. The Lord is with us. And friends, if the Lord is with us, the same Lord who brought the people out of Egypt and into the promised land, what else do we need?

What else do we need? In Matthew's gospel, in chapter 1, do you remember when the angel speaks to Joseph and says, Joseph, Mary, your fiancé, is with child, with the Messiah.

The Messiah is growing inside of her. And the angel quotes Isaiah chapter 7 and gives Jesus a nickname. He says, he will behold, the virgin shall conceive a son, bear a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.

[28 : 27] God with us. The name of Jesus means God is with us. And then do you remember the very last sentence in the book of Matthew? How does Matthew's gospel end? The Great Commission.

Jesus says, all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. So go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them all that I've commanded you, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And behold, what does he say? I am with you to the end of the ages. Friends, this is who Jesus is. This is his very name. This is the same Lord Jesus, the same Lord God who is with Caleb, who came down from heaven to be with us, who died and rose again, who defeated the grave.

This same Lord Jesus now looks at us in Hong Kong, watermark, and says, yeah, the future is unknown to you. You don't know what's going to happen. There's lots of uncertainty, lots of change.

But I hold the future, and I am with you. And so, watermark, what a wonderful faith journey we're on. What an adventure. The future is uncertain. It's unknown. There's many changes and many challenges, many obstacles we're still going to come across.

[29 : 33] But in all of this, we don't look to ourselves. We look to the God who has been faithful to his people. Great is your faithfulness from generation to generation. And we say, that God is with us.

We can trust him. Let's go into all that he has for us. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, your word is so wonderful because even though it's written thousands of years ago to a completely different culture and group of people, it still speaks to us today.

God, we sense in our hearts with so many changes and so much uncertainty and so much that's unknown. As we want to find a new venue, as we want to, as we start this new congregation, God, as leaders change, and I think of staff that are moving on overseas and people that are coming, people that are going, God, there's so much that's unknown.

But there is something that's known. And that is you. You are faithful. Your mercies are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. And so we will live with hope.

God, I pray, won't you help us as a church? God, when challenges come, an obstacle comes, may it not divide us. May it not cause division.

[30 : 45] May we be united around who you are and trust you that you will lead us into your future for us and for the city. God, help us to trust you.

Help us to trust you wholeheartedly. Help us to follow you wholeheartedly. Help us to trust you for the long haul. God, I pray that there will be men and women here in this church that will still follow you for 50 and 60 years to come, God.

That maybe they're in their 20s today, but when they're in their 80s, God, will still be loving the Lord Jesus more than they do today. God, let your spirit fall upon us.

Draw us to yourself, we pray. We need you. Pray this in your wonderful, great name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.