

HOW TO DRIVE OUT YOUR ANAKITES

JOSHUA 14:6-14

Well, college football fans, the first Ohio State game is less than a month away! A gentleman who happened to be a top person in an athletic department for a major college football program was once asked about the biggest problem he faced. He said, "Truthfully? Well, it's the guy who comes in on Saturday and says, 'You know, Coach, I don't feel like playing football today.'" "Wait a minute," I say to him. 'This is Saturday! This is the day of the game!' "I know, Coach, but I just don't feel like playing.'" "What do you mean you don't feel like playing?" "I don't know why. I just don't feel like playing football today.'" Then we go ahead and play the guy, and we find out he was only too right. That's the biggest problem we face. When guys just don't feel like playing."

Complacency, apathy, and indifference are easy pits to fall into in life. It can even afflict followers of Jesus as we go about trying to live lives that honor the Lord. We can just get used to a faith that's mediocre, stagnant, complacent and indifferent. It's very easy to get and stay there. You decide – probably unconsciously - that you've grown enough spiritually, or changed enough or developed enough, so you just stop trying or working at it. How do you know if that's happened to you? Well, let me ask you a few questions that you can answer privately today. Are you more like Jesus than you were a year ago? Has your knowledge of the Bible grown in the last year? Has your prayer life gotten deeper and richer in the last year? Have the key relationships in your life – your spouse, your kids, your parents – gotten better or worse? Is your commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ stronger or weaker than a year ago? Have you begun serving in a new ministry this year or strengthened your involvement in one you've been a part of? Have you had more spiritual conversations with non-believers this year than last year? When was the last time you personally led someone to put his or her faith in Jesus?

It's a good thing to examine your life from time to time to see if you're just settling for the mediocre and the status quo spiritually. The purpose in doing that isn't to make you feel bad, but rather to encourage and challenge you to keep moving forward spiritually, to keep growing, to keep trying to become all you can be for Jesus. Now, this morning I'd like you to reflect with me on two approaches to the Christian life. The first attitude is illustrated for us by the entire nation of Israel. The second attitude is illustrated for us by one man named Caleb. What an amazing contrast in attitude! Let's read about Caleb just now. The first attitude I want to examine with you was a kind of collective attitude demonstrated by the nation of Israel as a whole.

ISRAEL'S ATTITUDE: INDIFFERENT DISOBEDIENCE

Forty years before this incident recorded here in Joshua 14, the people of Israel stood literally right on the threshold of God's promise to them – the land of Canaan. They'd made the long trek from Egypt under Moses' leadership and now twelve spies – one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel – were sent into Canaan to check things out and bring back a report to Moses and the people. All of them reported that the land was beautiful and fertile. But, the country was full of people and some of them – the

Anakites – were unusually tall and large. They lives in strongly built, walled cities. Ten of the twelve spies recommended that Israel turn away from the promised land of Canaan despite God’s promise to go before them and defeat all of their enemies.

The other two spies – Joshua and Caleb – gave a positive report. Yes, there were very real obstacles and challenges, but the Lord had promised this land to Israel. They argued that if the Lord was with them, what difference did it make who was against them? They were confident that the Lord would help them defeat all their enemies. Well, the people of Israel as a whole bought into the advice of the ten spies rather than Joshua and Caleb. They refused to trust God. They refused to enter the land of Canaan. Israel lost heart and essentially rejected what God had given them.

Do you remember God’s reaction? No one above the age of 20 was allowed to enter Canaan except for Joshua and Caleb. For forty years, the people of Israel wandered around in the desert both literally and spiritually until, one by one, everyone above the age of 20 died off. That was the price they paid for indifference to God and His promises. Their indifference made them disobedient and they refused to claim what God had given them. As a result, God wrote them off. Right there is an uncomfortable lesson for you and me. Of course, God is loving and gracious. But if we become indifferent to God and are just determined to reject His will for our lives, there will come a time when God will write us off as well. He’ll just use someone else for His glory and allow us to die off muddling about in our mediocrity.

Forty dusty, hot years in the desert passed. Moses died and Joshua became Israel’s new leader. Under his leadership, a whole new generation of Israelites marched into Canaan and quickly defeated their enemies. That’s exactly what God would have done for the earlier generation if they’d believed God and obeyed Him. Israel became the dominant power in Canaan. Yes, pockets of resistance remained here and there, but Israel was in control of the land. Each of the twelve tribes was allotted their inheritance – a specific geographical portion of the land of Canaan assigned to each tribe.

The land of Canaan was Israel’s inheritance given to them by God Himself. The land was their permanent possession if they continued to follow in God’s ways faithfully. He helped Israel drive out the original inhabitants of Canaan and take possession of the land. This was a miracle that was only possible because God was with them. But we learn that not all of the residents of Canaan were driven out, killed or subdued. Here and there, God allowed pockets of resistance to remain. Why? In order to test the heart of the people. Would they fully possess every square inch of their inheritance? Or, would they instead become indifferent, lazy and tolerate the presence of their enemies? Would they get fully what they’d been given or stop short of it?

What does this have to do with you and me? A great deal! An inheritance is something we all know about. Someone dies and leaves a sum of money, or a piece of property, or a valuable art work to an heir or heirs. There are literal inheritances and there are, also, spiritual inheritances. The Bible tells us that as followers of Jesus we, too, have been given a spiritual inheritance. “And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact,

together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory.... And now that you belong to Christ,... you are his heirs...." (Romans 8:17, Galatians 3:29 NLT) So, what did you inherit as a follower of Jesus? I believe our inheritance is all that comes to us as a result of a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus. That includes forgiveness of our sins, the Holy Spirit living in us every day of our earthly lives, divine guidance and help in living out our daily lives, getting to be involved in God's mission to bring lost people to Himself and then eternal fellowship with God in Heaven after we die. All of that – and so much more – is your inheritance, your spiritual Canaan, so to speak. Because of Jesus, you've been given so much – a new heart, a new power, a new purpose, a new perspective, a new knowledge, and a new eternal home.

I hope you can see the analogy between the nation of Israel and you and me. God made an agreement with His people to be their God and they would become His people. He gave them Canaan as their inheritance. A short time later they refused to go into the land and get what they'd been given. Then, forty years later, a whole new generation of Israelites did go up and possess the land. But history shows that they never possessed Canaan fully and completely. They stopped short. Indifference, laziness and complacency crept into their hearts. They grumbled about the size of the territories assigned to them. They mumbled about the enemies that had to be drive out. They procrastinated so much that finally Joshua said to them in frustration, "... 'How long are you going to wait before taking possession of the remaining land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given to you?'" (Joshua 18:3 NLT)

Let's suppose one of your relatives died and left you a \$1 million inheritance. You heard about it, believed it and were very pleased about it, but – for whatever reason – you never actually got around to making an appointment with the executor of the estate, signing the necessary papers, and walking out with the check. You were given an inheritance, but you never received it. That was similar to the first group of Israelites who refused even to enter the land of Canaan. Now suppose you did go and receive this \$1 million inheritance, but – for whatever reason – you only ever accessed \$750,000 of it. You just left \$250,000 unused and unclaimed. You were given an inheritance, but you never received all of it. That's similar to the second group of Israelites who went into Canaan, conquered most of the land, but failed to possess completely every square inch of the land. The problem wasn't God's power, or His willingness to help, or the strength of Israel's enemies. The problem was the indifference, apathy and complacency of God's people. Indifferent disobedience!

Christian, you and I are a lot more like that group of Israelites than we care to admit. Sure, you may have prayed to receive Jesus as your Savior. You may have been baptized and joined the church. You may have had your sins forgiven and received the assurance that you'll be in Heaven when you die. But when it comes to possessing fully all that has been given to you in Jesus, have you become indifferent and complacent? Have you gotten used to living out a mediocre spiritual life? Is it appropriate to paraphrase Joshua's question to Israel and make it God's question to you and me today: "Follower of Jesus, how long will you wait before you begin to take full possession of your inheritance in Jesus?" How long before you desire to become all

that God wants you to become? What steps will you take this week to expand your knowledge of God's Word or to grow your prayer life? When will you start praying for the lost people in your circles of influence and look for opportunities to start spiritual conversations and even share the Gospel? Yes, you can settle for indifferent disobedience. Many of God's people have done just that, sad to say. But you can make a different choice – the attitude and the choice that you find in Caleb.

CALEB'S ATTITUDE: ENTHUSIASTIC AMBITION

Caleb didn't have an indifferent, complacent bone in his body! Forty years earlier, Caleb was ready, willing and eager to get what He'd been given. He knew then that if God was for him, it didn't matter who was against him. He knew then that with God's help, every Canaanite – even the really big ones! – would be driven out. Caleb wanted to possess his inheritance – all of it! But he had to wait forty years to get it because of the indifferent disobedience of the rest of the Israelites. But God hadn't forgotten Caleb. Forty years earlier, He had said, "But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land." (Numbers 14:24 NLT)

Fast forward forty years to the scene we read in Joshua 14. Joshua and Caleb stand before one another. Both are well into their 80s. The whole land lies at the feet of the victorious Israelite army, but Caleb isn't done fighting yet. As a pastor, I've learned that living many years doesn't mean that you have to have an old, worn out spirit. We have a number of older members in our church. Many of you are young in spirit, enthusiastic about God, and active in the things of God. By the same token, I've known Christians in their 20s and 30s who are "old" in spirit – worn-out, indifferent, complacent, bored – basically good for nothing spiritually. Physical age has nothing to do with enthusiasm of spirit! Caleb's faith in God was burning just as strong at 85 as when he was 40! And here he reminds Joshua of God's promise to him and adds these words, "I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then." (Joshua 14:11 NLT) What an attitude!

Your admiration for Caleb's enthusiasm ought to deepen when you consider what portion of the land of Canaan he requested as his personal inheritance. He wanted an area called Hebron which was about twenty miles south of what later became the city of Jerusalem. It was a hilly region which made it difficult to capture because the inhabitants were entrenched up in the hills. And, then, we discover that this region was inhabited by none other than the Anakites – a very tall, physically intimidating race of people who lived in strong, walled cities built into these hills. They were some of the very same people who had convinced the ten other spies forty years earlier that it wasn't worth it to obey God.

What Caleb says here thrills my heart! "So give me the hill country that the LORD promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns. But if the LORD is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the LORD said." (Joshua 14:12 NLT) What a contrast with the rest of

Israel! What they saw as an obstacle, Caleb called a challenge. What they considered a big problem, Caleb considered a big divine possibility. Just think about it! Caleb could have said, “Now, look, Joshua, I’m an old man and I have served the Lord faithfully for many years. I deserve an easy place to settle down. I shouldn’t have to fight anymore.” Instead, we see a heart burning with such enthusiasm and godly ambition that it ought to humble and challenge your own heart. It’s as if Caleb says, “Give me this land as my inheritance, Joshua. And give me that, specific mountain. Give me those Anakites! I’ve been waiting forty years to take them on! And I know that with God helping me, I will drive them out.” And he did! In the next chapter of Joshua we read, “Caleb drove out the three groups of Anakites—the descendants of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the sons of Anak.” (Joshua 15:14 NLT) Just like Caleb, you and I have an inheritance to claim. We need to claim all of it. That inheritance is fullness of life in Jesus. You became an heir the day you invited Jesus to become your Savior and Lord, but now you need to go on and fully get what you’ve been given. The day you were born again by the Spirit of God wasn’t the end; it was just the beginning!

So, how do you and I go about possessing our spiritual inheritance as fully as possible? Caleb’s story suggests the following strategy. First of all, identify your spiritual enemies. Who are the Anakites in your life today? It might be unconfessed sin. There’s no way you can ever become the man or woman God wants you to be, if there are pockets of sinful resistance that you refuse to confess to God and ask Him to help you remove from your life. Along the same line, your Anakite might be a spiritual stronghold. This is a sin that has a really powerful grip in your life. It might be an addiction to drugs, alcohol or pornography. It might be a chronic misuse of money – you’re always in debt, you make unwise decisions about money, or you lack integrity in using money. It might be gossip – at some level you just relish hearing and sharing about other people’s failures and problems. It might be resentment and bitterness towards someone for something he or she did to you that you can’t release to God. It might be a sexual involvement with someone that God can never bless or condone. It might be an uncontrollable temper or an abusive tongue – you just inflict lasting pain on people with your words. Spiritual strongholds are big, tough Anakites. You will never get what you’ve been given until you bring each one before Jesus defeated.

There’s a whole lot of Anakites! How about being too busy to serve the Lord through this church or out there in a ministry to the community? You’re not too busy to serve the Lord; your priorities are just wrong, that’s all. A bad self-image can be an Anakite. “I’m worthless. I’m hopeless. God could never forgive me. God could never use me.” My friend, Jesus died for you – that’s how important you are to God. You need to see yourself through God’s eyes as a person of great and eternal value. Yet another Anakite might be chronic worry or anxiety. You’re ruled by what might be or what might happen instead of who God is and what God has done and what God can and will do!

Secondly, attack your enemies in the power of the Holy Spirit. Identifying is important, but don’t stop there! The Israelites knew well enough who was hiding up in those hills, but they just refused to take them on. God won’t help you defeat an Anakite without your effort, your initiative, or your involvement. When did God remove those

entrenched, intimidating Anakites from the hill country of Hebron? Only when Caleb trusted God to literally attack them with enthusiasm, with initiative and with ambition. My friend, I don't know the specific Anakites in your life. I know most of them in my own life. But here's something else I know. We – you and I – will fully possess our spiritual inheritance – we'll get what we've been given – only when we say by our actions, "With God's help, I will drive them out. I refuse to be mediocre. I refuse to accept what can be changed. I refuse to live a life of indifferent disobedience." Attack those Anakites and God will help you defeat each one so that you can get what you've been given.

Thirdly, claim everything that is rightfully yours in Jesus. Caleb never asked for anything that wasn't his or that God hadn't given him. He simply stepped out in faith and claimed what God had already given him with enthusiasm, initiative and ambition. God has already given you forgiveness of your sins. God has already given victory over any and every spiritual stronghold. God has already given you all the time and the ability to serve Him that you will ever need. God has already given you peace of heart and mind. Claim it. Live into it. Remember what the Bible itself says, "Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ." (Colossians 3:24 NLT)

Let me tell you a story about Tuppence, a 17 year old cat. He only had one tooth, but he was eager to show his hunting skill to his master. He managed to pounce on a little sparrow and brought it to the door as an offering to his owner. Fortunately, the aging cat with one tooth wasn't agile enough to kill the bird. Carefully, the owner picked up the little bird, smoothed its ruffled feathers and proceeded to set it free by placing it in the grass in the middle of his yard. But the sparrow didn't move. It was traumatized. Minutes flew by. Finally an hour passed. Tuppence's owner tried nudging the bird gently with his foot, but it wouldn't budge. So, in desperation, he picked up the bird and threw it into the air. That gesture reminded the sparrow of how to fly, reminded it that it had the ability to soar out of harm's way, and how to flee away from all the troubles in the yard. That traumatized little creature had forgotten how to fly. It forgot to remember. You and I can be a bit like that little sparrow. We get so troubled and afraid that we forget that with the Holy Spirit's help we can fly away spiritually and escape every threat. Remember that little sparrow the next time you come up against a Tuppence or, for that matter, an Anakite. Be the creation of God that God designed and made you to be.

Possess your possession. Get what you've been given. Claim your inheritance – every last cent of it, every last square inch of it. Will you live every day, like Israel, in indifferent disobedience, or instead, like Caleb, in enthusiastic ambition? That's the choice and that's the decision. It's never too late to start a new adventure in Jesus. It's never too late to begin to possess your rightful inheritance. I hope as you identify, call out and then attack those Anakites that are unique to your life today that you will stand with Caleb, your fist raised in defiance, your heart full of enthusiasm, and your spirit brimming with ambition and say – "With God's help, I will drive them out!"